THE QUEEN'S DESIRE

BY HUME NISBET

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THE QUEEN'S DESIRE.

A Romance of the Indian Mutiny.

BY

HUME NISBET,

AUTHOR OF

"BAIL UP," "THE SAVAGE QUEEN,'
"THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART," "A BUSH GIRL'
ROMANCE," ETC., ETC.

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F. V. WHITE & CO.,
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1894.

A tale of the Indian mutiny.

DEDICATION.

I beg to Dedicate
this Indian Romance
To the most Severe Critic which, I think, I can have,
Sir William Wilson Hunter, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.,
M.A. (Oxford), LL.D. (Cambridge),
With Hopeful Fears and trembling, trusting that he
may overlook technical imperfections in
consideration of the earnestness with which I have
sought to interpret his works, and those
of other Lovers of our Great Empire India.

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AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

PREFACE.

To Sir William Wilson Hunter, K.C.S.I., C.I.E., M.A. (Oxford), LL.D. (Cambridge).

Dear Sir,

When I first thought about tackling this vast subject, The Indian Mutiny, I turned naturally to the writer whom I had a slight acquaintance with in the past for information, and he responded with promptitude, through that love of the native races which he has ever shewn in his erudite works, by advising me and sending me what he knew would be best for my purpose.

That I have obeyed my own pig-headed instincts throughout this present romance, for romance it is in the most literal sense, must not be wondered at, as I am a dogmatic Scot, who reads the Scriptures according to his 'ain lichts, and will not budge a point for either minister or gravedigger.

Still for all that, I fear many Anglo-Indians will not quite accept my version of this most awful tragedy; some will do so I think, at least I can but hope so, and those who have lived with the Brahmins and Buddhists for the biggest portion of their lives and know what the *real* professors are, I fondly trust will give me credit for my patient investigation and thought.

I fear also that I may offend some with my characters, yet I hope not, for you must always remember, in every class of society, that where two or three are gathered together, there the devil may be also, as well as the spirits of good.

I have had much reading and hard labour, as well as many an anxious hour over this present book, which was not written in a hurry, therefore, I may say, if a hard birth be the sign of a great one, then this child of my

fancy ought to grow into a big chap, for I have had great travail with him.

I have gone into many books for my facts, yours Sir William, which I need not enumerate, as they are so widely known, but others I must mention, such as Col. C. B. Mallison's, C.S.I., work the "Indian Mutiny," Col. M. Taylor's "Confessions of a Thug," "Pandurang Hugi," and so many more that it would take up too many pages to mention all the authorities which I have gobbled up in order to arrive at the true character of the Indian Natives, Hindoo Buddhist, and Moslem.

Perhaps I have idealized my Hindoo priest; I will confess that I have been swindled in my Eastern travels by the Hindoos, but never by the Buddhists, but then they were not very high-caste Hindoos with whom I had dealings, merchants somewhat after the type of the merchants of Petticoat Lane, therefore, I could not take them as a representative type. I only looked to the great principle of their religion, while I regard our high-caste Christian professors as practising the principles of our Faith, leaving outside of the question those hypocrites and vile traders in religion—the "Stiggins" class.

If I have gone astray, pray forgive me, you who know better. I have tried my hardest to present Indian and Anglo-Indian life of 1857-58 to you in a picturesque and vivid manner, and I can only hope that with all its technical blemishes I may enlist your sympathies with my faulty characters, and that you may say, when you have cast my story aside, that I have entertained you somewhat, even if I fail as a teacher.

With respectful regards,

I am yours, very truly,

THE AUTHOR.

Hogarth Club,
34, Dover Street,
Piccadilly, W.

April, 1893.

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THE QUEEN'S DESIRE.

A TALE OF THE INDIAN MUTINY.

Book First.—Before the Rising.

CHAPTER I.

THE CALM BEFORE THE TEMPEST.

FOR a minute the flaming sun hung, like a molten mass, about the mighty walls and numerous minarets of Delhi, the city of the Great Mogul, and then it dropped like a meteor from sight, leaving deep shadows over the temples and narrow streets, and a blood-like fume in the glowing spaces beyond, while the people came out to breathe and live; for another broiling day was over.

At this early hour of evening a great peace seemed to brood over the city, like the quietness which falls upon a household before the awakening from sleep. Above, that over-spreading arch of crystalline purity rapidly changing its rainbow tints from blood red, where the last rays shot up and rendered the fine dust atoms iridescent and flashing, to the upper reaches of deep blue, through infinite gradations of pearl, olive, and green. It was a short twilight of surpassing magnificence, yet a twilight as pronounced while it lasted as our boasted and gently evolving twilights of the north.

Those who have been gasping under awnings and sheltered verandahs for the past glowing hours, with the punkahs waving constantly above them, raise themselves up with sighs of relief as the night air steals over the gardens and cools their fevered blood, but they are too languid yet to get up from their mats or couches, that is, the European portion of the community. There is a grand reception this night at the palace of the king, but there is time enough yet to bathe and dress, for the delight of passive inaction is too enjoyable to be broken quickly up, so they yawn and stretch themselves silently without disturbing the calm which is brooding over the mighty city and the sleeping land.

It is the month of May, 1857, and therefore only the beginning of summer, yet it has been for the time of the year a remarkably hot day; besides there is no need for any European, male or female, to exert themselves, for never have the white masters felt life to be so hum-drum as it is at present in India; there is positively no excitement to wake up for, except it might be, perhaps, this coming gathering of native princes and representatives of Government at the Palace, which will be gay and glittering enough of course, but it is a common affair with this sham profligate court of the grand, ancient Mogul dynasty, now vested in that senile old reprobate, with his Jezebel queen and very doubtful heir.

The calm which dominates this gloaming seems also to pervade the whole country, and the soldiers are grumbling with torpid livers, for they can see no prospect of promotion while this state of affairs lasts, for of course a few regiments of discontented natives

jabbering about their superstitious caste wrongs of a night outside the barracks means nothing, and does not trouble the officers much, so long as the grumblers present an orderly appearance at parade next day, and that they always do, for the brown-skinned sepoys know better than to set their masters at open defiance, with the past examples before them of British rule and method.

"When a native grumbles to his own kind, pay no attention to the chatter," observed Major Waters, the beauty man of the company, to his companion, Lieutenant Green, as the pair stood under the shelter of the barrack verandah and watched the quickly changing phantasmagoria of colour in front of them.

Major Waters had spent six years in India, and therefore was in consequence a kind of authority with such fresh arrivals as young Green.

"There is only one way of managing these 'niggers,' and that way is firmness; never yield to any of their demands if you want to keep them docile and respectful; the Government has spoilt them with petting, and so, like sailors, they grumble when they can. Now those ridiculous rumours about bone-dust amongst the flour, and hog's-lard on the cartridges, which they tell me are floating about, are all bunkum of course, yet now that the natives have got the ideas into their stupid skulls, there is no use contradicting them, for they are such universal liars that they will never believe us, no matter how hard we swear. Now if I was at the head of affairs I'd force each man to grind his own proportion of bone-dust and make him smear his cartridges with *bonâ-fide* hog's lard, while if any resisted I'd hang the rebels mast-high promptly,

or if they mutinied *en masse* I'd disband them and pack them home to their own villages to starve. That's how I'd keep up discipline in the army."

While Major Waters delivers himself of his theory, and the twilight about the barracks deepens to night, through the villages of the Punjab and Oudh swift and silent messengers are passing, handing to the villagers, as they go along, small unleavened cakes or chapátis; harmless-looking gifts these appear to be, yet carrying with them the significance of the fiery cross.

"But I say Waters, suppose the whole Army rounds on us *en masse*, what then? They are pretty good soldiers, and first-class gunners, and outnumber us twenty to one at the least."

Major Waters regarded his juvenile friend for a full moment with a glance of superb contempt on his classic features, and then he answered quietly:

"Green, my lad, don't repeat that outrageous idea of yours to any of the fellows who know this country, if you don't want to be laughed out of the army. Sepoys round on their officers?—bah! it sounds too funny; come, let's have a brandy and soda to take the taste of it out of my mouth before we begin to sort up for this banquet at the old Mogul's. By Jove, my boy, this is your first levée there, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Lieutenant Green, a good deal abashed at the way his crude suggestion was received by his superior and mentor.

"Then I promise you a treat to-night in the way of barbaric and oriental splendour, for the old sinner does it properly when he is on the job. We supply

the female element, for of course none of the native lot will show up, and you know most of our crowd, so will be able to enjoy yourself, as the opportunities for flirting are great in the palace gardens, while as for the glitter of silk, cloth of gold, and jewels galore, by Jove! your eyes will open at the fabulous wealth laid out on each of these dusky carcases, which we are here to protect when we might be better employed easing them of some of that useless extravagance."

"Yes," responded Lieutenant Green, fervently, "I could manage with a little square looting, as an eking out of my present penurious income."

"No chance, my boy, at Delhi, while this blessed state of peace lasts, so that for the present we have only got to think about our livers, which reminds me that this ancient representative of a worn-out dynasty keeps a very decent tap, that is for a devout follower of the Prophet, in fact this is perhaps the only approach to decency you are likely to find about the gorgeous court of Delhi."

Saying which the two friends went indoors to split a preparatory soda, and afterwards give themselves over to their meek and lowly bathmen and dressers.

* * * * * *

Over against where the sun set so recently the yellow moon is now rising.

A round flat-looking platter of brass-work it appears as it lifts itself above the rounded domes and massive walls of this crowded city which nestles on that vast plain of marble tombs and ruined palaces, with the broad river Jumna rolling past; higher it floats on the green and star-spangled space, getting paler and more lustrous as it rises and floods in its magic light

the thickly-peopled streets with the lamp-illumined bazaars, silvering the stately mosques with their graceful minarets and the mighty fort and walls of red sandstone; casting detached deep shadows from the many-coloured robed pedestrians, or gathering in solid masses amongst the avenues of the luxuriant gardens where passion and murder lurk amongst the heavy clusters of jessamines and roses.

A fair scene of oriental splendour that seven-mile city of the Grand Mogul looks on this moonlight night of May, with its spreading and dream-like vistas of domes, cupolas and arches, and an animated picture also with the sellers and artificers in the lamp-lighted shops surrounded by their rich wares of silver filigree, brass-work and rare woven stuffs. Over the bridge of boats and through the Cashmere gate the visitors are streaming with their princely retinues, in a constant tide, gallant knights armed cap-à-pie and making their fiery horses dance and champ at their silver and golden bits, while the blare of trumpets and beating of drums announce their approach, and the less privileged crowd of sight-seers line the road-sides in their different robes, which denote their caste and creeds. All movement, melodious din and moon-toned colour, pervaded by that romance and mystery peculiar to the East.

In the cantonment grounds, which lie about two miles from the city, the road to which is lined right up to the Cashmere gate with the bungalows of the officers, for the king has stipulated with his conquerors that these guardians must be quartered outside his sacred city, the native regiments of sepoys are holding a somewhat excited meeting by themselves and with their friends, who have come from Meerut to visit them

and discuss their supposed wrongs. The chapátis have already been delivered to them, and they are listening with glowing eyes and savage looks to the fiery words of the Maulavi, or wise man, who now addresses them, and who has travelled far for this purpose.

A tall, lean and muscular man is this Maulavi, with high, aquiline nose, beetle brows, lantern jaws and lurid, deep-set eyes, and possessed of a powerful voice which reaches to the outer ring of his audience, while his savage eloquence and energy are undoubted, marking him out as a Master of men.

The officers as they lead out their wives and daughters to the waiting gharries and palkees laugh indulgently as this orator shakes his fist in their direction, and spits after them as they roll away amidst clouds of dust, for these learned doctors are privileged mendicants and nobody cares for what they may say; besides, the trusted sepoys are off duty to-night, and this is one of their ordinary pleasures, to get excited over the words of their preacher, and appear next morning docile and contented with their lot in life.

Tommy Atkins is likewise enjoying himself in his own rough-and-tumble fashion, for he has also visitors from the garrison of Meerut, and they are all away to the blandishments of the wicked city, with their belts and buckles ready for action, while the sepoys have the Maulavi and the cantonment all to themselves until the picket gathers up the riotous stragglers and the reception at the palace is over.

Tommy Atkins and his friends are behaving like wild beasts to-night, as they run amuck through the moonlit streets, with their belts swinging round

their heads and making ugly cuts where the buckle falls on the dodging skulls of Mahometan and Hindoo, upsetting the religious processions, chasing shrieking females into dark places, and hustling even the cavalcades of the maharajahs and princes who are going to the palace.

It is the way that these defenders of the British army have of enjoying themselves during the piping times of peace. The maharajahs smile gently as they politely give way to this rushing gang of Mohawks, the natives who have been knocked down, rise and look after them quietly as they wipe the blood and dirt from their faces, while the women come from the dark places and seek their homes without complaint, with heads downcast, and that ordinary apathetic air of listless melancholy, only a little deepened perhaps as they drag themselves along, with their veils closely drawn about them, and their black shadows trailing in front.

Through Chandniee Chouk, or the Street of Silver, a party of these merry marauders rush and swagger, with wild whoops like savages, while they look out for fair sport, and before them the citizens, male, female and children, fly like frightened sheep; not all of course fly, for here and there a dark-skinned native with fierce moustache will pause and instinctively feel for his dagger or sword, and then, thinking better of it, turn aside before the buckles can reach him and disappear within the shadows; the soldiers have it their own way so far, and no one disputes their liberty of action.

At one part of the street the flying crowd divides to let half a dozen of palankeens and their bearers

pass through them ; they are conveying some stranger nautch-girls to the palace, and are guarding them carefully from the vulgar gaze profane, for the bearers wear the livery of his majesty, and announce the fact loudly as they go along.

But the boys have tasted too much of blood and rum to-night to have any reverence left for king or priest, and nautch-girls are nautch-girls wherever met, so without a pause they pounce upon the prizes, scatter the royal bearers right and left, and proceed to let moonlight into those sacred covered palankeens.

The inmates, all except one, who seems to be the leader, shriek with affright and horror as they huddle together and strive vainly to keep their faces covered ; vainly, for the ravishing hands are tearing the gauzy material to shreds as they drag them from their places and handle the dancers as only Tommy can handle when he is on the frolic and his spirits are up.

With a leap like a tigress the leader, however, bounds from her seat in the palankeen into the full glare of the moonlight, with her head still muffled, and in her shapely hand, her arm bare to the elbow, glitters a naked tulwar which she swings about her, keeping the most reckless of her enemies at bay, for the weapon looks sharp and wicked, and the arm that wields it seems able to use it with deadly effect.

A striking figure she is in her rich nautch-dress with its flashing jewels and the gold-spangled gauze veil which floats about her on the night air ; tall, lithe, rounded and youthful, with perfect symmetry of outline, and majestic even in her rapid motions, she does not speak a word as she stands the centre of that admiring circle, who are men, even if rude ones, and

cannot use their belts and buckles on such an adversary, so they stand round her gaping, and for the time leave the more timid covey alone.

"Be Ja! but I'll have that woman in spite of her sword," exclaims one of the soldiers, as he makes a dive forward.

Next instant his headless trunk falls almost at her feet, while the head spins like a foot-ball some yards away as she leaps to one side to avoid the hot jetty stream that spurts from the neck and stains the white road, and then the British representatives draw back with a grunt as they see their comrade fall, and begin to draw their bayonets from the scabbards; that sudden tragedy has changed the spirit of fun into the thirst for vengeance, and they forget that it is a woman they are about to charge.

At this critical moment two figures join the company, one in pith helmet and wearing the stripes of a sergeant, and the other the stalwart Maulavi who has been lately addressing the native regiments.

The Maulavi has only his pilgrim staff, but he uses it with such good effect that half-a-dozen of the army bite the ground, while the sergeant with his fists goes sturdily for the rest, who, when they see who it is, for his helmet has fallen off, slink away like school-boys caught by the master, and leave the maulavi and him alone with the nautch-girl and her dishevelled band.

It is all over almost as quickly as the daring soldier was killed, and while the others pick themselves up and follow their comrades, the young sergeant approaches the woman, who has lowered her tulwar, and addresses her with a few words of apology

for his men, in the native language, to which she responds with a silent nod of her stately head, as she looks at him steadfastly through a corner of her veil.

A handsome young fellow is Sergeant Jackson and well set-up, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and with a blonde moustache covering his upper lip, and as he stands in front of her tall and stately figure he is fully a couple of inches above her head, so that she has to look up to him slightly.

Then she speaks with a clear voice, which has a slight intonation of command about it:

"I thank you, Sahib Havildar," glancing slightly at the stripes on his arm, and then back again to his handsome face, over which the moonlight shines; "you have saved my life, and I am one who never forgets."

The Maulavi starts when he hears her voice and makes a step forward with a deep obeisance, and then, seemingly recollecting himself, he turns and shouts to the bearers, who seeing danger past are returning to their duty; the nautch-girls have once more covered their desecrated faces and are taking their places in the palankeens.

"I have killed a kóóta who dared to attempt to touch my robe, but I will answer for that to the king; for you, Sahib Havildar, when the time comes, I shall remember this night and *you;* wear this for me as a sign of my gratitude."

"And protection," added the Maulavi, in a deep voice, as he glanced at the ring which she drew from her finger and held out to the handsome sergeant.

"Good night, Sahib Havildar; the star which ruled your birth was a lucky one," saying which she glided

towards her palankeen and gave the order to move on, leaving the gallant sergeant with the costly ring in his hand, looking after her in silent astonishment and admiration.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE PALACE OF SHAH-JEHAN.

THE palace and grounds of Béhádar Shah were lighted up in a most artistic style with countless silver, gold and wrought-brazen lamps; that is lamps were dexterously placed within niches to display to the utmost the delicious ornaments and carvings, and avoided where the ravages of the many conquests had left scars and disfigurements.

It was not the oriental paradise it had been in the days of its originator the Shah-Jehan, yet enough of its ancient glory remained to dazzle the eyes of the guests, particularly those who, like Lieutenant Green, were fresh to the country.

A wide, lofty and massive gateway led through the great walls into the somewhat neglected, yet still beautiful, gardens of the Palace, for the old Mogul Béhâdar Shah was somewhat of a miser on ordinary occasions, and did not like to spend any of his income on repairs, or the keeping in order of his grounds, although on occasions such as this, his oriental vanity and ostentatious love of display, with dread of appearing small in the eyes of his neighbours, made him launch out in royal style, not an uncommon reason even amongst us Westerns for behaving recklessly at times. It is not given to everyone to have the philosophic strength of mind of the poet, and

ask his friend to bring his own food and wine when he comes to visit, and oriental princes dare no more be philosophers than dare ordinary parvenues who are aping a position.

The gateway through which Major Waters, with his pupil Lieutenant Green, drove, appeared more like a long tunnel than an ordinary passage ; it was built from solid and heavy blocks of red granite, richly ornate in its decorations and fitted on both sides with chambers which had been utilized as a charchowk or great bazaar, so that it resembled an arcade with the open shops, within which the turbaned merchants sat with their artistic goods displayed so as to tempt the lingering visitor.

Beyond this lay the open court, where the chobdars or ushers waited with their silver wands to place the carriages and palankeens in order and lead the guests inwards.

In the Diwán-i-áin or outer hall of judgment, with its magnificent pillars, arches and filigree-worked ceiling, they found the guests being waited upon by their own retinues and the host of palace servants ; a vast hall of exquisitely inlaid marbles and cemented precious stones, with the open courts around, where the bright moonlight streamed over the tessellated pavements and became blended with the mellow glowing of the perfumed oil lamps.

Rich rugs covered portions of this mighty hall floor, while awnings of faded-looking, yet almost priceless, tapestry hung from the arches ; the throne. with its canopy of marble, supported on pillars richly inlaid and gilt, projected from a small alcove at one of the sides, giving the place, with its bronze gates,

and mosaics representing flowers and birds, the appearance of an Italian cathedral; the marble table below the throne was once the platform of the Vázir, when the judgment courts were being held, but at the present was used for placing the hats of the gentlemen and the cloaks of the ladies, before they entered the Diwan-i-Khas, or Hall of State, where the ex-emperor and large family of sons waited to receive the company.

The crowd of grandees and Government representatives who were entering and passing through the hall appeared dwarfed by the magnitude of the place; it was to be a ceremonial reception to-night, for the head of the department, the Lieutenant-Governor, in his route to the frontier had paused to give some promotions and decorations to the princes supposed to be most loyal to Government, and to those officers and civilians who were lucky enough to have influence at head-quarters.

Favour ruled the roost at this date in India, and where the honours were bestowed made many a veteran and hero laugh in his sleeve, but not with pleasure. Civilians who had done their utmost, by their crass stupidity and overbearing injustice, to create rebels, were complimented on their services and rewarded; uniformed asses and poltroons were raised over the heads of experienced men; Rajahs and Ameers, who were all but declared traitors, received publicly the thanks of the Government for their treason, with decorations and a lac or two of rupees, while the men who wore scars under their turbans and tunics were either altogether ignored or else insolently rebuked; that is how they managed affairs in the East under the old order.

Lieutenant Green took his cue from the more experienced Major Waters and hustled one of the richly dressed natives aside, as he pushed towards the Hall of State, with such careless force and rudeness that the other nearly fell; it was what the other British gentlemen were mostly doing and evidently what the natives expected, for this native merely smiled good-naturedly and even apologised for in very perfect and musical English :

"I beg your pardon, Sahib, for standing in your path."

Major Waters looked round as he heard the voice, and then turned back to speak to him and patronisingly introduce his companion.

"Ha! Green, let me introduce you to his highness Dandhu Panth, the Nana Sahib, and one of our most faithful friends."

"You honour me, Waters Sahib, with your commendation," replied the Nana, showing his small white teeth in a bland smile.

"Not at all, my dear fellow; you must see the prince's palace at Bithúr next time you are at Cawnpur, Green; the prettiest place along the Jumna, and my friend here is the best host in India."

He patted the prince familiarly on the back as he spoke about his hospitality and palace, to all of which Dandhu only bowed the lower, spreading out both hands in a deprecating manner peculiarly eastern in its suggestiveness.

"And what has brought you up this length to-night, Sahib; has Government recognised your claims at last?"

"No, Waters Sahib, I have resigned my claims for

ever and am content to be as I am, the obscure friend and humble admirer of your great nation; I have come to see more worthy friends rewarded, that is all."

Prince Dandhu Panth, better known as Nána Sáhib, still wore his gracious smile, although his velvetty eyes looked a little brighter as he placidly answered this tactless and insulting query; for it was well known over India to be a sore point with him that his just and moral claims had been scornfully denied by the Government, as were those of his friend the Ranee of Jhansi, and scores of other less important personages throughout the land who had given their friendship to the overbearing conquerors.

In age he was about twenty-two, rather stoutly built, yet most graceful in his carriage, with an intelligent and prepossessing face, although slightly pock-marked, features rather grave and pronounced, with large, dark, expressive eyes; as light moustache shaded his rather full lips, while the silky down of a virgin black beard darkened his olive-tinted cheeks and chin.

He was richly dressed, as became his high, although by the Government unacknowledged, rank, as lord of all the Maráthá princes, with a tiara and aigret of precious stones, and white feathers surmounting his turban, while over his robes, waistband and fingers sparkled a fortune in gold and heirlooms. To-night he was costumed, as were the other native guests, in his regal robes of state, as etiquette required, although on ordinary occasions he dressed and spoke as like an English gentleman as he could, and behaved much more like one ought to than the generality of the representatives about him.

As the adopted son of the last of the Peshwás Báji Ráo, Dandhu Panth, according to the eastern laws of heredity, had every right to expect the pension of £80,000 to be continued to him, particularly as he had a large body of followers, bequeathed to his care, to provide for; this, however, the Government refused, allowing him only to retain the fee-simple of the property, and with the savings of the Peshwai. In vain were his most temperate and logical appeals, supported by the two British Commissioners who in succession superintended the administration of his estate, both to Lord Dalhousie and the Home Government, their replies being curt and rude in the extreme; it was after this distinct refusal that Nana Sahib cast aside his former shy reserve, and mixed freely with the British, throwing open his palace of Bithúr to guests generously, as if to prove that he had accepted his defeat with a good grace.

As they were speaking, they left in company the Diwán-i-áin and passing through the third court entered the Diwán-i-Khás or hall of state with the other visitors preceding or coming after them.

Behind them, yet keeping as near as possible to his master the Nana, walked a slender and handsome young man, who seemed to be even better known to the European portion of the company than was the prince, for he was greeted with familiar words on all sides, and not a few smiles from the ladies, to which he responded modestly. This was his Muhammadan secretary and friend, Azim-Ullah Khan, who had only just returned from a lengthy visit to England and the Crimea in the interests of the lord of Bithúr, a most intelligent, handsome and gentlemanly young man

the ladies said, who could keep them amused with his observations of life and society at home, without forgetting his place and *colour*. He was also gladly welcomed at the mess-tables, for he could give them all the yarns about the Crimea, where he had spent some time; he was particularly devoted to his master, and Nana appreciated that devotion.

To get to the hall of state they had to ascend the broad steps of a chabútra or platform of about three feet in height, the sides of which were beautifully carved, while from the façade hung rare hand-sewn curtains, which partly shaded the massive columns of white marble inlaid half-way up with precious mosaics, while the upper portions were richly picked out with gold.

A canal of water flowed through half of this magnificent hall, and in the centre, on a white marble daïs, where formerly stood the famous peacock throne, now were the aged King of Delhi, with the male members of his family surrounding him.

The king himself was seated in regal costume on a silver throne, with his female attendants, umbrella and fan bearers behind him, and behind these again were marble lattices, overlooking the broad Jumna river from which rose a grateful breeze that gathered the perfume of a thousand flowers, as it swept through the large and shady gardens.

The king was an attenuated, feeble-looking and worn-out old man, with a snow-white beard falling from his thin cheeks to the breast of his rich robe. Beside him stood a tall, black-bearded man on his left, while at his right hand was a young man, bearing a strong resemblance to the man with the beard.

This was the old king's youngest son, Mirza Jewan Bakht, the heir-apparent, while the black-bearded man was the favourite of the foolish king and his chief wife, the fat, termagant Zinát Mahál Begum.

Only the king had a seat in this hall of state; his twelve other sons remained standing like the guests in front of the daïs, and as the visitors entered and made their obeisance—to which the king responded with a listless nod, for he seemed half asleep—they ranged themselves round as they best liked, or mixed in groups according to their caste, position, or the friends that they chanced to meet, making the place appear like a conversazione, the servants going constantly about with refreshments and delicacies.

In India, despite its vastness, each one knows all about the other, even to the minutest details of their expenditure, means, peculiarities and evil doings, so that although the representatives of the press were here in force, and their ideas of editorial responsibilities were to report all the tittle-tattle and scandal of the so-called Society, it seemed wonderful how they could find "copy," seeing that their items must have become chestnuts before they were issued to the public, yet they did thrive for all that, with their retailing of stale chaff, as some of their more modern imitators still do.

Yet although all the world of India was aware of the characters, good and wicked, of their neighbours, there seemed to be no such thing as cutting a black sheep. The most virtuous of matrons will receive quite effusively as her friend the female who has become the common talk of the regiment, and permit her to associate familiarly with her daughters, that is if she be

of equal rank with themselves; this is the point where dignity begins and ends, morality not being considered of any importance beyond furnishing food for fresh gossip over the afternoon tea.

There are good and virtuous ladies in this company to-night, as there are brave and true men, in spite of their false impressions about the natives; but there are also a few dainty creatures, perfumed and deliciously apparelled, who are as false and abandoned as the wickedest imagination can conceive, who are there for the express purpose of singeing the wings of the weak moths who hover about them. There are also many pious women present, some of them so bigoted in their religious notions that they are almost ready to copy the tactics of the naughty sirens in their attempts to convert the poor heathens of the land, and who are doing their level best to assist the blundering Government to stir up rank rebellion in the bosoms of the most faithful of the conquered races, who resent the foolish efforts and pious zeal of these lady preachers as bitterly as they do the false rumours about the hog's-lard and the bone-dust.

Tender wives and affectionate mothers most of them are, however, with the very few exceptions, who will be tried presently as seldom wives and mothers have been in the world's history, and who will come from the fire without a flaw.

Presently, when the decorations and rewards are given to the wrong men, they will all go out to cool themselves in the shady gardens; when the native princes, left contemptuously and severely to themselves, will gather into knots to discuss these mistakes over their cheroots, while the sirens will lead away their

victims, and the virtuous matrons will discuss their scandalous conduct in open whispers, and the condescending lady missionaries will lay siege to some high-class Brahman or Buddhist, and imagine that they are doing their duty by outraging all that he has been taught to consider sacred.

Gallant officers also will treat their courteous and high-bred allies with as much rudeness as the most brainless and ignorant of the giddy women who go to make up this mixed society, while they quaff freely the king's excellent champagne and puff out careless clouds of tobacco, and then they will drive home again thinking that they have all supported the dignity of England properly, and that their allies must love them for their condescension, and never dream about the storm that is about to burst over them so shortly.

But, however badly the worst of the much-talked-about ladies may behave, none of them ever stoop to compromise their brittle fame with the natives, however lofty their rank or ancient their pedigree may be; and when the deluge of fire comes, few, even of the most abandoned, will think to save their lives by entering the zenanas.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAGIC LIQUID.

SERGEANT JACKSON stood watching the processions of palankeens and bearers as they ambled along the moonlit street in the direction of the palace, trying to picture the kind of face which would be likely to go along with that symmetrical figure, and the perfect hand and arm which was now waving the good-bye

to him from the silvery space, a hand and arm like ivory in the moonlight, upon which glistened gem-studded bangles and rings of the costliest.

Sergeant Jackson had a sweetheart of his own race, who lived at Lucknow with her father and mother, and whom he had not seen for the past seven months, nor was he likely to see her until by some lucky engagement he was elevated from the ranks of the non-commissioned; for Maggie Wilson's father had gained his commission during the interval of their last meeting, the consequence of which promotion was that Sergeant Jackson had either to make a move also upwards or else resign all prospect of winning his sweetheart, for being a soldier he could not run away with her or marry her without her father's, and his superior officer's consent.

He was a decent and orderly young fellow, as well as a smashing soldier, and doubtless might win his commission in time if he steered his boat properly, and made no enemy amongst his superiors, a task which required a mind of the Macchiavelian order, when so many young fools were sent out and allowed to swagger about with swords and order flesh and blood as they liked; still he had gone into the army as a boy, and by constantly watching and guarding his temper he had brought it well under control, and was able to make himself agreeable to all men without as yet losing his own self-respect; considerate, yet firm, with the men under him, and respectful, pleasant, and always ready to oblige those over him, he was a general favourite, while his good looks gave him the favour of the ladies who, under the rose, pretty well decided the destinies of the men.

Of course he had decided in his own mind that Maggie was to be the future Mrs. Captain Jackson, but that was a long way ahead yet; while rumours had lately reached him that the absent fair maid was not altogether wearing the willow for him, but had been filling out the period of probation by several lively flirtations with the young subalterns of the station where her father was placed, and this did not tend to keep him indifferent to the fascinations of a pretty passing face, it being part of his policy to play the amiable to the ladies who were at hand, as well as the agreeable to their husbands, and naturally, being of a gallant disposition as became a true son of Mars, his policy and his inclination ran very willingly together.

He had helped to rescue a graceful and sweet-voiced woman, while the mystery of that veiled face added an additional spur to his curiosity to know some more about her; he had also, with his quick observation, seen the respect that the strong-handed pilgrim had given this unknown heroine, not at all consistent with the customary treatment of nautch-girls, and this fired his imagination and made him solved, if at all possible, to go on with the adventure.

There would be no difficulty about getting into the palace grounds to-night, and mixing with the retainers, where he might see her again, and if he had some reasonable excuse——

Suddenly his eyes, now that they had no longer the palankeens to fix them, fell upon the bleeding trunk and detached head of the slain soldier at his feet; the head was now lying with the face upwards, and the

eyes set with a fixed glare at the moon; his duty was clearly to get the remains taken at once into camp, and report the tragedy without loss of time to his captain, who at this moment was within the palace; this duty would be his excuse, and he seized upon it with the promptitude of a ready-witted soldier.

Placing the ring, a large emerald with some mystical characters carved upon it, and surrounded by a snake border, upon his little finger, which it exactly fitted, he stooped to examine the features.

"Pat Kennedy," he murmured, as he recognized the corpse as one of his own subordinates, "the wild boy of the company; you have played your last prank, comrade, and, insubordinate as you were, we can spare you badly at this present time, for you had the pluck of ten men in a scrimmage."

He looked up as he raised himself, and met the deep-set, dark eyes of the Maulavi fixed upon him with a sardonic expression.

"One of the doomed," growled the deep voice harshly.

"Yes, and his death will have to be accounted for," answered the sergeant. "Who are you?"

"My name is Ahmad-Ullah of Faizábád, sahib, a stranger in Delhi, and on a pilgrimage to Benares."

"You have come out of your way considerably, Ahmad-Ullah."

"Sahib, I have come from Lahore," returned the other quietly.

"Ah! and who is the woman who killed my comrade?"

"I may not say, sahib, but she is great in the land, and you have done good work to-night by her; she can

account for that deed, and if you speak the truth she will not be questioned."

"I'll tell the truth, of course, but you must come with me to the palace and give your evidence, meantime I must get this body taken to the cantonment."

"All your desires shall be fulfilled, sahib ; see."

The Maulavi uttered a peculiar cry, and from the shadow-side of the street sprang several natives, who gathered round the pair respectfully.

"The Sahib Havildar wishes this luckless one removed from the city to his own place ; see that this is done at once."

One of the natives bowed, and ran down the street to find the carriers, while the Maulavi turned again to the sergeant.

"Sahib, permit these men to see your ring."

The sergeant, always willing to oblige, held out his hand for the inspection of the natives, who one after the other, bent over it, touching it with their brows, and murmuring :

"Mubarak-bashad, sahib." (May you be fortunate.)

In a few moments the messenger returned with four of the low-caste burial men, who after placing all that remained of the once daring Pat Kennedy on a stretcher, and getting their instructions from the sergeant, moved away in the direction of the Cashmere Gate, while the other natives, at a sign from the Maulavi, crossed the street and once more disappeared within the shadows.

"Now, sahib, I am at your service," said Ahmad-Ullah, and with these words they both went towards the palace.

After a few moments' silence the sergeant, unable

to control his curiosity, began once more to question his somewhat morose companion.

"This princess — I think you said she was a princess?"

"You have said it, sahib," answered the other quietly.

"I suppose she is young, she looks so?"

"She is not old, sahib."

"And good-looking, eh?"

"That is for her husband only to know, sahib."

"Or her lover to find out?"

"Perhaps, sahib."

"She is married then?"

"She has been, sahib."

"Ah, a widow, that is more interesting, and accounts for the liberty she has."

"She can do what pleases her, and no one dare say a word," returned the Maulavi in a deep tone.

"By Jove, I wish I knew what she is like," muttered the sergeant to himself, despairing to get any further information from his companion.

They had now reached the great granite gate-way, within which the bazaars glowed with their wealth and variety of colour, while beyond those again the outer court shone out whitely. Where they stood the moonlight fell full upon them with a brilliancy almost like daylight, only for the black shadows which fell from their figures and from the ornaments on the wall.

"Sahib Havildar, I am a Maulavi, and can let you see the face of the one whom your thoughts are running after, if you wish to see her."

"Of course, I want to see what she is like, you

Maulavi," replied the young soldier impatiently, as he turned about and faced his companion.

"Give me your hand—no, not that one, the other, the left hand, which carries the ring."

"Some hanky-panky, I suppose," muttered the sergeant as he held out his hand to the other.

The Maulavi gripped the hand, outstretched, by the fingers, and after examining the palm carefully, next raised his piercing eyes to those of the sergeant and looked at him intently for a few moments, after which he poured a few drops of dark fluid, from a small flask that he took from his breast, into the open hand, and then, still holding the fingers as if to steady them, he said:

"Look into your hand, and you will see what you desire."

Sergeant Jackson bent his head forward so as to see better into the little pool which he held in his hand, and as he did so, the Maulavi again fixed his eyes upon the downcast lids, and watched him earnestly.

It was a common enough trick, as the sergeant knew, although not so easily explained; he had seen it often played before, and in most cases had tested the verity of the pictures, therefore it was with a good deal of faith and expectancy that he watched and waited to see the result of the experiment.

For a moment the little patch of liquid trembled and caught in minute eddies the silver glister of the moon, then it settled down to a black repose like a blot of ink on a desk.

Over the inky blackness he noticed a thin film of whitish lustre slowly gather, then this cleared away, and the mirage or picture gradually loomed out upon him.

First the scene lately enacted in the street with the nautch women, palankeens and attacking-party, passed like a panorama before his eyes, finishing up with himself and her as they had stood before they parted.

That faded and was replaced by a picture of the palace gardens, where, before a brilliant company of English and Orientals, the Nautch leader and her companions were evolving their slow and stately Nach, while the silver moon and the golden glow of many lamps blended and shone upon their floating transparent drapery, glancing limbs and flashing ornaments. The impressionable heart of the gallant sergeant began to beat quickly as he watched this glowing and artistic dream.

Next he was standing alone with the beautiful figure in a chamber which resembled part of a mosque or temple, with the moonlight streaming between the carved pillars full upon them ; her head was still muffled, but his hand was fumbling about the wrappings, and she was not resisting ; then all at once that picture faded, and a face like a vignette lay before him instead, the face of a young woman, olive-tinted yet full of sensuous and melting beauty, the features regular and high-bred, with ripe-red, half-open lips, showing pearly teeth and eyes large, limpid and glorious.

The sergeant heaved a mighty sigh as this radiant picture dissolved, then he looked up to thank the Maulavi for the treat he had given him——

Looked up to discover that the Maulavi had disappeared like the beautiful houri, while along with that learned man had vanished her costly gift of gratitude, the emerald ring.

CHAPTER IV.

A LOVE EPISODE.

AFTER looking up and down the street in the weak hope that the Maulavi would return and explain his eccentric conduct, Sergeant Jackson first cleared his hand from the delusive fluid and then delivered himself of a few choice barrack-room expressions of anathema against the thief.

He swore deeply, fluently, and energetically for a brief space of time, making the passers-by who did not understand English, wonder what sudden remembrances moved this fair-skinned, blue-orbed Havildar so much that he had to stand and call upon his gods with such earnest and euphonious expressions, for the British soldier when easing his mind possesses a vocabulary of expletives not given to ordinary mortals, and Sergeant Jackson had been noted from his drummer days, even in the barracks, with being able to round off and enrich a sentence beyond most of his fellows.

At the present moment he was wounded in his most sensitive parts by this tricky and pilfering Maulavi; valuable property had been stolen from him, and this rent his heart, for he was of an economical and saving disposition; the anticipated pleasure of showing off that gift as a love-gift was taken away, which hurt his vanity prodigiously, and he had allowed a witness to escape while under his direct control, which wounded his soldierly susceptibility; so that it is best to leave his eloquence to the imagina-

tion of the reader during this interval of vituperation, rather than weaken the force of it by giving a single sample.

He did not for a moment doubt the truth of the vision which he had seen; he had been too long in India, and witnessed too many unexplainable mysteries, to discredit anything supernatural; this rascally Maulavi might be a thief, and a liar with his tongue, but his magic was *bonâ-fide*.

Therefore his corrugated brow began to smooth, and he consoled himself that he was bound to meet this beautiful dancing lady again at some future time, perhaps to-night, also that she was interested in his own good-looking countenance, so that when they did meet he would be able to explain his loss to her, and most likely wheedle a substitute out of her to keep for her dear sake; he had a good stock of blarney on hand, and it would be easy for him to pile it on with such a beautiful listener.

So, once again fired with hope, he turned into the gate, resolved if stopped by any of the king's servants, that he would ask for his officer (Major Waters) on important business, and if confronted by that gentleman, to word his story so as to screen the real delinquent as far as possible; indeed, lucky inspiration! he would punish the thievish Maulavi, by putting as much of the blame upon him as he possibly could. Pat Kennedy being wiped out, it could not matter much to him who suffered for the murder, while as for the other boys engaged in the fracas, they would be silent enough for their own sakes about the matter.

No one, however, disputed his entrance into the palace, for the ceremonial portion of the reception

was over, and the old king had retired to his wives in the zenana, while the guests were enjoying their tobacco and coffee in the open courts and gardens, so that the sergeant boldly strode through the halls and found himself shortly amongst the shadows of overhanging trees quite unobserved amongst the busy and fashionable throng.

He had been too long accustomed to the thoughtless frivolity of the European element of this Anglo-Indian society, to take much heed of what he saw going on about him; it was too common a sight for him to be either astonished or shocked at witnessing the husband of one wife making extravagant protestations of affection to the companion of the moment, who chanced to be the wife of some brother officer or civil servant, or when he surprised a tender *tête-à-tête* in another shady corner between the wronged lady and someone else's husband; and that all this should be taking place right under the eyes of those dignified and jealous-minded native gentlemen, who strolled about making notes of the social habits of the hated Feringhees, or those silent and gliding spectres of attendants, of whom no one took any more heed than if they had been mere machines; the sergeant merely smiled grimly under his splendid moustache, and took a mental vow to keep a tight hand on Maggie Wilson when she was his property, and he laughed to himself at the way the noble men were being fooled, while they congratulated themselves that they were fooling; it seemed to him a comic game taking it all round, and whetted his desire to see some more of his unknown dancing nymph, for the fever of love-making is about as infectious as the influenza.

He came upon Major Waters, the flirt and pretty man of the regiment, in one of the most beautiful and romantic portions of the garden, drinking coffee beside that dangerous siren, little Mrs. Finch, at least he knew that they were there by the Major's insinuating voice and her rippling low laugh, for under the shadows of the broad-leaved plantains only the scarlet glow from the fragrant cigar could be seen, and with his usual discretion the adroit sergeant went round by the other end of the grove where, by the side of one of the many fountains, he stumbled upon the recreant Mr. Finch, reciting some of "Lalla Rookh," in sentimental tones, to the romantic and ignorant spouse of one of the commissioners, through whose interest Mr. Finch hoped to get another step upwards in the civil grade.

He saw a good deal during that walk of the frivolity, heedlessness and selfishness of this society, which disported itself like butterflies, or rather giddy night-moths, their careless contempt of the natives who hovered about them as if these coloured men were deaf and blind as well as dumb, that utter disregard of all womanly reserve and propriety which some Englishwomen learn so quickly in the East.

It was nothing for him to see fair women in their petulance of jealousy, or fits of temper, at some supposed neglect strike the humble and servile Hindoo, that waited upon them, savage blows on the face, or to see the gentlemen kick a passing servant from the path into the jungle; he, himself, had done so once or twice as he went along, when they came against him accidentally, leaving them to utter their profuse apologies or mutter their curses to the air, after they had picked themselves up, for was he not

one of the masters, and what were they?—rubbish. It is astonishing how quickly even the most genial of men and the gentlest of women can become tyrants when they get the unlimited chance.

And yet he felt in a most tender and sympathetic mood towards this coloured race to-night, at least, as represented by one of their females, and longed to meet her with a keen and manlike zest which did not at all interfere with his placid affection for the absent Maggie; all the rest of the people were spreading their favours to night, and why should he not imitate his superiors. And with that great moon overhead, white and mesmeric in her lustre, the plashing of the many fountains, and the combined perfume of roses, jessamine, scarlet-starred poyntzettas, orange, lime and citron blossoms, and the effect of the marble-domed summer-houses and waving palms, with the clustering shadows from the massive tamarinds, mangoes, and banyans, softened by the trailing vines, what young and stalwart Englishman could be an anchorite, far less a barrack-cooped soldier out on leave?

He had reached a portion of the garden, close to a small, white-pillared ruin, above which the thin-leaved peepul trees grew with many a flowering festoon hanging to the branches, and through which the moonlight filtered, and cast down on the path-way a thousand diamond-shaped patches.

In the distance shone out from the leafage the snowy walls of a mosque, which seemed to float ghost-like on the filmy space; like a dream of Turner's this tender distance of leafage, flowers, and pillared-marble looked; while the foreground was lavish with a picturesque neglect.

A fountain shot up its silver spray close at hand, which fell with a melodious tinkle into the wide marble basin filled with gold fish, and better than all, there were no amorous couples to take offence at his proximity, the situation being too light and open for a comfortable flirtation.

Here Sergeant Jackson could light and smoke his economical cheroot without dread of being *de trop*, and perhaps find the fortune come to him which he had been vainly seeking for the last half-hour. He had lived long enough in India to be a firm believer in Kismet, and somehow had an instinctive feeling that he would see his charmer this night.

Therefore, moving aside the tangle in front of him, and disturbing a roving snake which glided from him with a hiss and a rustle, he went over to the open, and sitting down on the marble rim of the fountain, where the moonlight streamed over him, and where he could be easily seen by any one coming, and so run no risk of being accused of spying on his superiors, he struck a lucifer, lit his Trichinopoly, and settled himself for a good hour of steady enjoyment and solitary reflection, if nothing better came to disturb him.

As the moonbeams lighted up his shapely figure and the portion of his features which the helmet did not cast into shadow, they gave him a semi-poetic and sentimental look; he was handsome in the truest and most manly sense of the term, without any of the drawing-room prettiness of his major, a man who could talk gently and persuasively to the woman he loved, and yet rise up like a young lion in her defence when the need came, such a man as women

either pale-faced or tawny, would like to look upon and be flattered to hear love from, warm-blooded, powerfully-built, and with all the fascination of youth and strength, aided by a tight-fitting costume, which revealed the contour and sweep of the shapely limbs; a soldier, therefore the conqueror of weak woman, and in his most dangerous mood of waiting for an adventure, with the blue smoke eddying up from his lips and his eyes watching the floating circles dreamily.

The paradise around him was enchanting enough to make even the most unimaginative mind think about poetry, and to an outsider watching him, his appearance might easily have impressed them that he was composing an ode to the bul-buls, who piped their clear lays in the thickets. But he was not thinking about any of these subjects as he leisurely puffed out and watched the thin circles of smoke; his meditations were more practical, and might be put down in this fashion:

"Yes, George, my boy, there is trouble in the wind with them natives, or I'm a Dutchman. They are getting nasty, and we'll have a scrimmage before long nearer than the frontier, when my chance will come for this long-thought-of promotion. I stand in well with the colonel's lady, I know, and she is sure to say a good word for me when the drums begin to beat.

"This beauty who is playing the nautch-girl, I wonder who she can be? Some Ranee or Begum perhaps, for she carries a fortune of precious stones on her, and that stolen emerald was worth a pot of money; damn the thief of a Maulavi that took it from me.

"However, I was always a lucky dog, and if I see her again, I'll pile on the sawder and get as much more out of her before the fighting begins, for I'll take

my oath she's ready to drop into my arms, and since she is a widow the bold game is the one to play."

He was a fortunate young man this Sergeant George Jackson; all good-looking men can be lucky while they are young if they have a grain of common sense, and George had that quality even if he was destitute of high-flown sentiment.

Even as he smoked and meditated, a shadow fell over him from some object between him and the moon, and on looking up he saw to his delight the woman he was speculating about, and alone.

To spring to his feet and take hold of the outspread brown hand with its wealth of rings was his first instinctive movement; the second, in accordance with his laid-out plan of action, was to place his other arm round her slender waist and gently press her down upon the marble rim where he had been sitting, and where he now also placed himself beside her, still keeping his arm around her.

"You are bold, Havildar," she said, quietly. "But I like boldness sometimes. I have been looking at you for some minutes and wondering."

Something in the calmness and voice of this veiled figure made the sergeant's manly heart beat timorously, so that it took him all his courage to keep from drawing his daring arm away; there was no foolish shyness about her, but there was also something more than the gold and ivory-hilted dagger displayed in her shawl which seemed to warn him to be wary in his approaches.

Still he braced up his ebbing courage as he thought of that vision which the Maulavi had shown him and the easy manner of the waist under his caress.

"What were you wondering at, dear lady?"

"Three thoughts set me wondering," she replied, steadily.

"And these three thoughts, what were they?"

"First, I wondered if you were different from your false countrymen, who can love so easily that they share their wives with other men, as I have seen to-night?"

"Yes, sweet one, I am different, I have no wife to love——"

"And no lover?"

The sergeant almost blushed, but comforted himself that if he did so, the tell-tale colour could not be seen in the moonlight, as he replied boldly:

"And no lover, unless I can be yours."

"Go on, Sahib, tell me how you would treat your wife if you had one." She was speaking softly now, so that he could answer with a better conscience.

"I'd keep her to myself and take good care that no one else shared her."

"Good, Havildar, that is how we like to be loved; I next wondered what you were thinking about as I watched you?"

He could be truthful in his reply this time, so he answered, fervently:

"I was thinking about you, my beautiful one, as I have been since we parted."

"Ah—but, Sahib, you have not seen me, I may not be what you think, perhaps I am old and ugly."

"No, dearest, that you cannot be; besides, the Maulavi——"

"The Maulavi!—has he dared to tell you anything about me?"

Here was a chance to have a dig at the absent thief which the adroit soldier did not neglect.

"He told me that you were a widow, and free."

"True, I have been a wife," she murmured.

"He also let me see your likeness in my hand.'

"Maulavis sometimes tell lies, Sahib."

"Yes, they do," he replied, with a savage emphasis; "and steal as well, for he has robbed me of your gift, which I prized above all my other possessions."

"Ah, he did this?—that was my third wonder, Sahib, what you had done already with my gift."

"But now you know, dear one, and can excuse me for not wearing it."

"Now that I know I do excuse you, and will get it again for you, and more, Havildar, I will give you another before we part to-night to wear with it, and something that will protect your life from all dangers; come, let us walk a little way, for I have much to say to you and also to show you, and the time is short."

They rose from the seat, she leading him down the pathway towards the shining mosque, and he keeping his arm still about her waist; as they did so, several dark and orientally-clad figures passed from the grove, over the moon-patched pathway in front of the ruined building, and disappeared within its portal.

"Listen, my friend," she said, rapidly, as the pair moved along. "Until to-night I hated your people with a bitter hatred, for they have wronged me deeply, so that blood alone can wipe out the insult, but you have saved my life and made me your sister, so that now in my eyes you are no longer Faringhee, but blood of my blood, and I will save you alone of all your race."

The sergeant listened to this outpour complacently pressing the hand and waist that he held tenderly, and thinking, "George, my lad, you are progressing."

Her denunciation of his people did not cause him any uneasiness, for he had the true British contempt for the natives as enemies, and was wishing nothing better than an uprising of the discontented Rajahs so that he might distinguish himself by helping to wipe them out, for these petty squabbles were the only chance a soldier had in this country of raising himself, but it pleased her to speak, and he was not going to rouse her temper by contradicting her.

They had reached the steps of the temple and she was guiding him up them.

"I am rich and powerful enough to protect you and make you a prince of the land, after our tyrants are driven into the sea; you are only a Havildar now, and I am glad of that, for I will make you a Rajah, after I have punished my enemies, if you desire it."

They were standing inside the portico face to face, and his hand was stealing up to that aggravating veil.

"Can you doubt my desire, my queen, to be yours, and yours only, all the days of my life? for my heart is all your own—I love you!"

The sergeant had no experience with the ways of eastern veils, and so he failed to take off this one; besides, the woman was too quick for him, as she said:

"Not yet, sahib; come with me, I have much to show you yet, and if you mean what you say, I may unveil to you before we part—come."

At one part of the building she touched a stone,

placing his hand also upon the spring so that he might know it again, and whispering as she did so:

"This is one way out of Delhi, by which you can escape when the time comes, but be discreet and keep it to yourself."

"A way in as well as out," he thought, but he said nothing as he followed her past the secret door, which she drew after her when they had entered.

"How does it open from this side?" he asked carelessly.

"This way, sahib; you press on the other end, here."

"Good."

Along a dark and narrow passage they went, and after this down a great many steps until at last they reached level ground once again.

"We are under the River Jumna now, sahib, and outside the city."

He did not reply in words, but squeezed the hand he held softly, which responded to his grasp, as they went on. It was good to know about this exit and entrance; he would gain Kudos for it afterwards perhaps.

It was stifling hot here, while the smell of the bats was almost overpowering, but he held in his breath as well as he possibly could, and followed her blindly as she led him onwards for what seemed to him a good half-hour, until at last he was nearly exhausted, while the perspiration drenched him, and his head felt like to burst, as they reached another long upward flight of stairs, down which a little fresher air began to come to him.

He had recovered himself before they reached level

ground, and was able to see a little ahead also, for the wall was punctured with narrow fissures at regular intervals, through which the moonlight poured in thin bars on the earthen floor.

Another door, touched from the inside like the first one, admitted them to a small chamber with a portal at one end and an open window in the centre of the wall, through which the moonlight fell cold and clear, leaving a bright patch in the centre of the apartment and darkness the more impalpable on either side.

"Come, sahib, we must part here," she said, as she drew him to the lighted space. Then as they stood together, he recognized the place as the third picture which the Maulavi had shown him, and his heart began to beat feverishly, for now he thought she would reveal herself.

"Through that portal you will find the mosque, with the way clear to the plain, my friend sahib; take that road after we part."

"But we are not going to part yet, beloved one," he murmured, as he once again possessed himself of her waist.

"Yes, sahib, I have much to do this night, and must be far from here to-morrow; but we shall meet again if you love me as you have said."

"You will let me see your face, dearest; you will let me kiss your lips?"

"It is shameful for a woman to show her face before she is with her husband in the Zenana, and you must not ask it. Nay, sahib, I love you, but you must promise not to look upon me and I will unveil so that you may kiss me—once."

"I promise you by all that is sacred, dearest; to

obey you, so that I can place my lips on yours," he cried impetuously, as he caught her yielding form to his breast.

"Come to the shadow then, sahib, and I will do as you wish."

He went with her to the side furthest from where they had entered, and in another moment the dewy lips met his, while with his free hand he was feeling the features that he could not see. Yes, she was beautiful, he was sure, with tresses like silk as they fell over his fingers, and breath which laved his cheek with the fragrance of the pomegranate.

He did not content himself with one salute, and she also seemed to forget what she had made him promise, as she responded with a fervour equal to his own.

At last she gasped faintly:

"No more, Aga Jau, lord of my life, no more, for I must go, and first I wish to give you what I promised. There."

While he held her to him closely and caressed her with his hands, she was busy with trembling fingers putting the charm about his neck, while he thought:

"I must get one look at her face before we part," and as he thought this, he felt softly in his pocket for one of his lucifers.

"This is the ring of our betrothal, Aga Jau; wear that for our love, the other you will get back to-morrow, and you must not lose it again, or evil may befall you; once more, beloved, before I cover myself and leave you."

Sergeant Jackson felt mean, after all she had so generously bestowed, at what he was about to do, but for the life of him he could not resist the temptation;

so with that amulet on his breast, that ring on his finger, and the woman showing her infinite trust in his honour, Judas-like he put one arm about her neck to bring her face closer to his, and even while their lips met in a long and lingering kiss, he drew the match with his free hand along the wall against which he had been leaning.

With a scratching sound the lucifer ignited, while a blue illumination from the brimstone showed him, faintly and for an instant only, that flushed and beautiful face, with the heavy large eyes, humid as a gazelle's and filled with the intensity of confiding affection, looking up to his; then with a tremulous cry of mingled reproach, grief and shamed horror, she struck the light suddenly from his hand, and darted from his arms with the words like a wail bursting from her lips:

"Cruel, cruel and false Faringhee. Farewell!"

He took a step forward, and spread out his arms eagerly to catch her, but without success. The sudden click of a closing spring, with a waft of chill air on his right cheek, were the final signs of her presence, and then all was as before, with moonlight, shadow, silence, and that gaping portal facing him which led to the ruined temple and the open plain, so Sergeant Jackson, striking another match, lit his second Trichinopoly cheroot, and puffing forth energetic clouds of smoke, strode loudly along the echoing pavements, gnawing viciously at his tawny moustache.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONCLAVE.

WITHIN a richly-furnished underground chamber a number of Oriental gentlemen sat smoking their hookahs and cigars, and drinking black coffee, while the discreet Khidmutgars moved about barefooted and silent as ghosts, for they were waiting upon the masters of their own race now, and were in danger of being rewarded for any awkwardness or lack of attention, with a sudden swish of a keen-edged sword or the deadly prog of a sharp-pointed dagger instead of the ignominious kick of the bilious and choleric Faringhee.

The slave may be kicked and come again with dark thoughts in his mind respecting his insulter, but for a split heart or a severed head there can be no after-brooding over wrongs as far as the unlucky stumbler is concerned; therefore these slaves were particularly careful not to make any mistakes about the orders delivered to them, and the dark-hued masters were waited upon assiduously and not kept in suspense as the kicking Faringhee might have been.

Overhead the silken-fringed punkahs were swinging with a constant and rhythmical motion, moved by the hands or toes of the unseen wallahs outside, and as they swung they dispersed the clouds of smoke which floated upwards with the fumes of burning incense, and perfume from the sandal wood-fed tripods which helped to fumigate the close atmosphere of this subterranean apartment and supply brands for the hookahs.

That the floor was composed of marble could be seen from the narrow margin left free of heavy rugs in the centre, where a large square bath had been excavated, and to which polished snowy steps led on the four sides, giving it the appearance of an amphitheatre with a richly carved silver fountain in the middle. As this bath was over thirty feet square and about twelve deep from upper margin to the bottom, it was like looking into another chamber now that it was empty.

A canal of clear water gushed down the centre of the end wall within a niche curtained on each side and revealing broad-leaved plants; it had been designed to represent a waterfall with the weeds growing from it; the rocks of this fall were composed of oxidised silver, while the water rushed down with a subdued splashing most refreshing to listen to on a hot night as it disappeared under the bath and, after supplying the fountain, and when required the bath, found its way into one of the large wells or tanks which are about the mosques and temples.

The extent of the hall, for in size it was a hall, could not be easily guessed at first sight, for it was lined with innumerable mirrors cut into fantastic shapes and framed in delicate filigree work of ivory and gold with mosaics of mother-of-pearl, while, with the exception of one space, the upper floor was covered with mats, shawls and cushions, upon which the smokers reclined; this one space was a raised daïs of ebony with a state chair placed upon it, the only chair in the place.

This was the underground summer bath of the Zenana where the beauties of past generations were

wont to watch their plump figures reflected and repeated in those countless mirrors, and where they could escape from the fierce heat and tormenting mosquitoes.

No daylight penetrated to this secure retreat, but a vast number of shaded and coloured lamps imparted a softened glow to the wealth and richness of the furnishing. There were several entrances and exits, before which hung massive curtains, some of these leading to gloomy dungeons where delinquents were sometimes walled up for their sins, others leading to different parts of the palace or the gardens, and even outside the city walls, for in this land of uncertainty where the king of one day might be a refugee the next, the builders of these palaces honeycombed them with passages like a rabbit hutch.

It was a good place for conspirators to meet, when they had faithful servants watching the exits so that no spy could steal upon their conference, and the aged king of Delhi had given it over for this dark purpose on this night, and these henchmen were faithful to their feudal lords, preferring rather to be killed by them than kicked by the hated usurpers, so there was none here present who did not feel perfectly secure in spite of the silent watchers and listeners who were amongst them.

Fully a dozen princes and lords were lounging on the cushions and smoking gravely without speaking, for their number was not yet complete, and they were waiting for the others to enter; they were representatives from different provinces, and mostly men young, or at least not yet past the prime of life.

All at once there was a movement of the curtains

from the palace passage, and the princes rose to their feet while the old king was led in by two of his sons and placed upon the chair of state; at a sign from him they once again seated themselves on the ground and resumed their pipes.

The curtains of another passage were pushed aside and the Prince Nana, with his brother, who resembled him closely, Asim-Ullah and two other personages entered with a slight obeisance to the king, and flung themselves upon some of the spare mats. One of the last comers was little more than a boy, by name Ráo Sahib, the nephew of Nana, and his companion was an old man, as aged as the king, without a trace of his weakness, and dressed in the costume of a Hindu priest, he was the spiritual adviser and deputy of the deposed Maratha chief.

After a pause the curtain was once more pushed aside impetuously, and with a rapid stride the Maulavi Ahmad-Ullah, entered, and after flashing his dark eyes round the company, he grunted deeply and growled as he leaned on his staff:

"The Ranee of Jhansi comes, like her fickle sex late to the council."

"The Ranee is here, Maulavi," uttered the clear voice coldly, which had sounded so warm and rich in the temple when with Sergeant Jackson, as a curtain at the far end parted, and the graceful figure, now attired in suitable costume, entered, leaning on the shoulder of one of her women, both closely veiled.

"I have been waiting outside for your tardy coming, Maulavi, as I have a word to say to you before we begin."

"Say on, your Highness!" answered the stern-faced teacher, as he bent his head sullenly.

"I gave a ring to-night to one who saved my life."

"A Faringhee—a common Havildar," sneered the Maulavi bitterly. "You who have sworn to annihilate the Faringhee, root and branch, yet, for a simple service which any Chowrie might have done, you forget your oath, and have bestowed your signet ring upon this low-caste Durzee as if he were a Dárogha at the least."

"No matter, Maulavi, I passed to him my royal word, and with it this protection which you have robbed him of, and which must be restored. I appeal to my fellow princes, may I not purchase the life of a man if I desire it? My friend, Nana Dandhu Panth, what have you to say to this. Have we not been robbed sufficiently already of our regal rights, that we must also be curbed of our desires in such trifles as the life of a man? Lord of the Universe, must I lick dirt and be forsworn to please this Maulavi of Faizábád?"

The temper of the Ranee was getting up as her words rushed forth rapidly like a rising torrent, so that the object of her wrath began to shift uneasily on his feet, while the old king, waking up from his torpid apathy, murmured peevishly in a thin tone of irritation:

"Allah, protect us from an angry woman; what is all this fussad about. Am I not the master?"

Clearly the old dotard imagined himself once more under the influence of that well-known termagant, the ornament of the palace and mother of Mirza Jewan Bakht, which raised a laugh at his expense from the conspirators, when the suave and

smiling Nana rose, and began with his smooth voice to pour oil upon the waters:

"Clearly, my poor Maulavi, you are wrong, and must give back this ring to my fair friend the Queen of Jhansi, since it belongs to her; no one surely can object if she chooses to place the ægis of her favour over one poor and insignificant Faringhee, so that she does not interfere with our killing the rest; indeed there are some of us who may be disposed to grant the same favours when the hour arrives, for the sake of variety in our zenanas."

A murmur of approval greeted these oily significant words, while the Ranee stood stiffly, and now silently before them.

"Therefore, Maulavi, take my advice and leave such paltry tricks to the professional dacoits, and with the restoration of this pilfered bauble, let us all assure the Ranee that her favourite will be safe at our hands, until she is wearied of him."

"It is gratitude only which makes me protect this Havildar," began the Ranee, choking with suppressed passion at the insinuation so glibly delivered by the courtly Nana, when he waved his jewelled hand gently and continued:

"Doubtless that is so, fair and noble Queen, but we are met to discuss the destiny of the Chota lat Sahib and his race, rather than the fate of this little man. Maulavi Ahmed Ullah, give up the ring, and let us get to business."

The Maulavi, seeing that the sympathy of the meeting was against him, drew the emerald sullenly from the folds of his turban, and held it out to the owner, saying harshly:

"There, lady, take your ring, and Allah confound your fancy, for if this sort of grace is likely to extend, I'll retire from the game before my head is forfeited."

"I'll ask no other exception," answered the Ranee sternly, as she once more placed on her finger the signet. "And but for my pledged faith you might have had this man also, for he is like his race, false and base; but for my honour he must not die, at least not yet; as for all the rest, men, women, and children, ten hundred thousand lives will not satisfy my revenge, there must not be a single Faringhee left alive, except this one."

"This is how I like to hear you speak, oh. my friend," replied Nana, with kindling eyes, his former courtly suavity gone, and a savage curl taking the place of the smile on his full lips. "We are robbed of our rights and our prerogatives, our lands are taken from us, with the equivalents they swore to give us instead. Who am I that was the son of Bajei Rao, the Peshwa of Poona, the lord of the Máráthas, but the plain Sahib of a poor little house at Bithúr. What is she who was the Ranee of Jhansi? What are you all but fly-flappers to these dogs, you Sahibs who were once kings?"

A deep growl greeted these impassioned words, while jewelled hands fumbled with the rarely worked hilts of their bichwas, and the old monarch on his chair of state woke up with a fretful whimper, as the orator continued, in a more subdued voice:

"Many of you have fought and eaten wounds for these same graceless masters who dishonour you for what you have done, and laugh at your scars; many of you have been kicked like any chandalah by these

white-skinned masters who are casteless, and therefore whose touch is pollution. We cannot bury or honour our dead as we ought to do, our gods are dishonoured, our temples defiled, while they mock and spit at your prophet."

He was speaking still in a subdued voice, yet husky with emotion.

"They would force us to become of their accursed creed by trapping us into losing caste as they have already done the Sepoys, and what are they? Kuttas who cannot trace back a thousand years their descent, and what is this creed of theirs? all lies which they do not pretend to believe themselves. You have seen how they treat their wives, and how their women dishonour them, while they only laugh and count it nothing to follow the example of pariah dogs. Ask Azim-Ullah Bahader here how they do in their own country, and he will tell you, for he has been there and knows it all."

Exclamations of scorn and contempt arose on all sides from these conservative husbands, while one or two cried out scoffingly:

"We need no other evidence than our own eyes; have we not seen the bandas?"

Nana continued in a softer tone than ever:

"But these dacoits, with their dullals and Shudra women, are fools and blind, for at this time, when they have made tigers of us, they take all their own men away out of the land, and leave only the sepoys, whom they have outraged, to protect their women and children, so that we have only to rise up and we can sweep them into the sea. Speak up, my Bahader Khan, and tell these fallen gentlemen how the wolves

are being devoured in other countries, as we shall swallow them up here."

The Nana sank down on the cushion and signed for his own hookah, while the slender and polished Azim-Ullah, that prime favourite of English society, rose up to tell of what he had seen during his wanderings across the "black pond."

"Illustrious ones, it is true what my lord has said, that the English in India are behaving like fools just now, because their good fortune is turned from them, and the days of their rule are numbered, otherwise they could not be so blind to the warnings already given to them at Barhámpur and other places. They have robbed our rulers, and made enemies of the allies who for generations have served them loyally, and, worse mistake than all, taken their own forces out of the country, thereby delivering themselves into our hands, and have otherwise acted as a people must act whom the gods have driven mad in order to destroy; they have suffered also so heavily in the Crimea, as my friend here, the representative of Russia can tell you, that it will take them years to recover their lost prestige amongst the nations, if ever they do so."

He paused in his address, and looked towards a heavy-looking Cossack Mussulman, who rose to his feet with a lumbering motion and said thickly:

"It will take the Faringhee twenty years to breed fresh soldiers enough to hold their own in England, far less to send any more out here; we have manured our fields with their dead, so that the harvests will be prosperous for many a season. Yah! you have only to lift your hands, and the lands you have lost are yours, as they were before."

The Maulavi here broke in, looking at the Cossack Khan keenly:

"What assistance does your august master promise us in this war of extermination, Khan Bahader?"

"He will not interfere so long as the struggle is with the Faringhee, for you do not require any aid to drive this handful from your country, but he is prepared to help you if any of the other Powers attempt to come to their assistance; he gives you his moral support now, and if wanted afterwards, as I have said, he will serve you with men and arms."

"And for this *moral* support, we must recognise him in the future as master, after we have wrested our rights from the slaves of this Faringhee Begum?"

"He will be your friend in the future since you have chosen him as your adviser in the present, and to prove it, I have with me this map, which my gracious master has had prepared, and will stand to, so that there may be no future quarrelling between the Mahomedans and the Hindoos."

As he spoke he took a roll of paper from his belt, and unfolded it so that his audience could follow his finger as he pointed out the divisions.

"This portion, the smallest of the three divisions, will belong to His Majesty the Mogul, of Delhi who will be lord paramount of India, such being the universal sentiment upon the matter."

A grunt of disapproval rose from the Hindoo members of the council, but as the subject had been fully discussed before, and the majority were Mahomedans, no one openly expressed his opinion; the Nana alone bit his red lips until the blood came.

"This portion, the largest of the three, will belong

to and own the future Peshwa of India as its sovereign lord, who shall only be expected to send a few elephants every year to Delhi as tokens of his affection, while this portion will belong to that royal lady the Begum of Oudh and sovereign of Lucknow on the same conditions. I have said."

The Cossack chief sank back on his cushion and taking out some tissue paper from a pocket-book, began to roll up a cigarette dexterously, all the while looking with half-closed eyes on the figure of the Ranee, who stood near the entrance, through which she had come, with her hand-maid supporting her. She was there to listen, and give her vote to the resolutions of the other rebel chiefs, but she was only a woman in spite of her possessions and power, while these men were Orientals, who did not pay much deference to the sex. Even the Khan Azim-Ullah, with all his recent acquaintanceship with London drawing-rooms, seemed to have lapsed once more into his barbaric privileges and left her isolated.

After a pause, during which the map was examined by the chiefs in turn, the Nana rose, having composed his features and recovered his plausible manner.

"Khan Bahader, I agree to the terms laid down since your master has willed it so, in the name of these Hindoo lords and Maráthá princes, whom I represent, and will acknowledge the lord of Delhi and his successors as the sovereigns paramount of India, Mahomedan though they be, for the sake of amity and peace, and tell your master this, as we may require his aid hereafter."

Another dark-visaged and turbaned figure rose.

"I also consent to these terms in the name of the Begum of Oudh, whom I represent."

"And you ought to know the mind of the Begum if any man does, Mummoo Khan Bahader," murmured the Nana, as he turned with a laugh to his own friends, which they joined in.

"I have the parchment here for your signatures, princes and rajahs," said the Cossack, as he drew another roll from his belt with a quill and ink-bottle, and handed them to an attendant.

Another of the servants here knelt down with his back as a desk to the throne, while one of the king's sons raised him up, and guided his trembling hand until he had signed the agreement so artfully worded, which transferred broad India from the then ruling power to that northern bear who wishes to hug all.

No one read the conditions which were written on that parchment agreement, but one by one they signed their names under the signature of the king, as the two attendants paused before them; the Ranee was the last to affix her caligraphy, after which the Cossack agent, with a smile of satisfaction, rolled it up and placed it once more securely within his waistband, saying carelessly: "You have arranged the date for the universal revolt, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the Maulavi, "everything is fixed for the 31st of this month."

"And this is the 6th, good; in twenty-five more days the hundred years' rule of the Company will cease."

"And we shall be a free nation?"

"Not then, nor ever, oh, deluded ones," breathed a solemn quiet voice, which appeared to come from a far distance, and which fell into the astonished ears of the conspirators like the voice of doom, for they sprang to their feet in consternation.

Before them the stately form of an aged man stood upright, and clad in the mystical robes of the Buddhist brotherhood, regarding them with a calm yet sorrowful expression.

"A traitor in our midst," shouted Tantia Topi, as he rushed upon the intruder with drawn sword and cut savagely at the upright figure; the keen-edged weapon passed through the solid-looking stranger as if he had been only air, while the chief nearly fell with the impetus of the blow.

"Jasim Barragi!" said the Maulavi, shrinking back from the intruder with a shudder, while the rest gaped upon him open-mouthed.

"I saw you, from the midst of my retreat, making this foolish compact, and I came out of pity to tell you the truth," breathed in a sorrowful voice this strange image or spectre. "Azim-Ullah has been with the conquerors in their own land, and could have told you that they are all-powerful, and like devouring lions in their wrath. Azim-Ullah has known their women, and could have told you that although their ways are not your ways, yet that they are noble, virtuous, and as steadfast as their husbands and brothers are strong and resistless.

"You are deluded by this tyrant from the far north, and even if you could succeed and drive out your present masters he would place a yoke about your necks, which would be like iron compared to the wood that you now wear.

"But you will never succeed, rather will you sink deeper in the mire amongst which you are now wading; you may shed a little blood and wallow for a space in crimes which will make your names abhorred

amongst the nations, and then your sun shall set amidst oceans of blood, the blood of your wives and children, while you will be hunted like wild beasts and utterly destroyed."

The voice died away faintly, while the figure dissolved slowly into thin air, turning their blood to water as they watched it disappear.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE BARRACKS.

LITTLE Sammy Tompkins was a bullet-headed boy, who kept the barracks lively in spite of the rigid discipline of his father, the drill instructor, and the energetic abuse of his Hibernian mother.

A stern and most unbendable man was drill instructor Tompkins, who had a firm belief in extra drill and bitter sneers for raw recruits, great mouthfuls of bad language in Hindostanee for the sepoys, and a constant application of the cowhide for Sammy; he had been brought up on this sort of moral pabulum himself, and felt that he was the better soldier for it, so having a regard for raw recruits as future heroes, if properly trained, and a liking for the sepoys as comrades of many years' standing, he was not the friend to spare their feelings if he thought they were likely to go astray or lapse from their duty; while, as for Sammy, his sole token of marital felicity and successor to his military honours, if the whip could make a man of him, it was not going to get mouldy for lack of service, therefore the back of Sammy was seldom without some palpable sign of his father's affection,

while even the afflicted one could not conscientiously assert that he did not deserve it as often as he got it.

Mrs. Tompkins had been thrice married, and each of her husbands had belonged to the Indian service; Bridget Milligan had been her baptismal name, while her whole life had been spent in barracks.

Her first husband was an Irishman, like her father, and a full private, who unfortunately died in the hey-day of his youth from cholera; her second mate was a Scotchman, and a corporal, who married her in her first year of widowhood, and put her again into weeds as soldiers often do who are ordered to active service, and then the English colour-sergeant Tompkins snapped her up and raised her in the ranks, so that by virtue of her great experience as well as her husband's grade and, for the past few years, permanent position in Delhi, she had come to be regarded as the mother of the regiment as well as of the drummer-boy Sammy.

In those days the accommodation in barracks was very inadequate as regards the married men, many of the wives having to do the best that they could in the common room, so that a matron like Mrs. Bridget Tompkins was much needed to protect her sex, and act as umpire to the many disputes which took place; indeed her time was so fully occupied with her neighbours and their offspring that the father was forced to take Sammy much earlier in hand than other fathers usually do.

Sammy was not very great at reading or writing, but his education had not been neglected for all that; at ten years of age he could play on the kettledrum, the fife, and the bugle, even to satisfy his father, he

could also blaspheme in Hindostanee and English as well as any man in the ranks, either Faringhee or sepoy, and hold his own in the ready-witted if not over-refined repartee to be heard in the ranks when the soldiers are off duty.

He had engaged in every sort of mischief which a boy brought up amongst rough men could engage in; he knew his way about every one of the by-streets of the imperial city; he had prowled about the ruins and temples which studded the great plain, and might have shown Sergeant Jackson many other secret passages beside the one he had been led through already; he had robbed the royal gardens many a time, and ran many a risk which might have appalled the bravest man amongst them, while as for the deep tanks into which the natives dived from sixty feet platforms, it was his delight to outvie the most daring; in fact he was the most Irish looking, round and freckled-faced, whitest-teethed and merriest boy in the cantonment, who had never yet known the sensation of fear, or shyness, and cared no more for his daily whipping than he did for the bite of a mosquito.

"That awful spalpeen will be the death of me yet," his mother would remark plaintively to some of her neighbours, as she saw him led off by a couple of sepoys to the triangle, where his irate father waited whip in hand. "No amount of bating seems to drive the divil out of the young imp," while his father would say:

"I'll whip the divil out of him yet, don't be afraid Biddy, my darling."

On the morning after the palace fête Sammy was in dire disgrace, which not even the triangle could wipe

off; he had become a deserter and was at present waiting in the cells, where he had been all night, to be reported and court-martialled by the officers as soon as they were awake.

Five days before this he had taken one of his father's pistols out to the plains and nearly blown his hand away with it, as well as half killing a passing Fakir. The Fakir he left without any apology to pick himself up as best he could, while he ran home himself, pouring the blood from one palm to the other under the impression that he was saving it; the army surgeon bound together his torn hand and then consigned him to his father, who kept fever from setting in with his usual application of the strap, only this time laid on doubly strong, after which Sammy was sentenced to ten days in barracks.

Three days afterwards he had broken his parole and walked all the way to Meerut, a distance of forty miles, to visit a little sweetheart of his, whose father had lately been ordered there from Delhi, to tell her about his accident, thinking it might interest that very young lady.

He arrived at the station fagged out, covered with dust and desperately hungry, and just got one look at the maiden, when her father came on the scene, questioned him closely about his leave and, not finding the replies satisfactory, sent him back under arrest, without giving him time to steal even a chaste salute.

A terrible offence this appeared in the eyes of both his parents, which nothing could palliate; it was such a bad example to the sepoys, that his father could hardly hold up his head on this sunny morning, while

his army-trained mother had passed the night wailing and weeping over her disgraced son.

"Bad cess to those dark-eyed brats of girls to go seducing a brave young boy from his duty; ough sure an' what a soldier he would have made if this Nelly King hadn't gone and led him astray," she whimpered in the ears of Molly Brannigan, the corporal's wife, thinking that his professional career was over.

"Sure, an' they wont be so hard as to drum the little blackguard out of the ranks, Mrs. Tompkins," said Mrs. Brannigan, consoling with her afflicted friend. "A night more in the black hole an' a taste of the cat will be the most they'll give him."

"Gad only knows what they'll do to my misguided son; all I can hope is that the Holy Virgin may soften their hearts, an' let them give him to his father to punish him."

"Sure thin it's a scored back he'll be having this blessed day if Sergeant Tompkins has the welting ov him," responded the friend.

"And serve him right if he does get off so aisy, for it's not only himself that deserted, but he took the Major's big dog away wid him, and now the poor baste can hardly limp."

"Ough, but it's a sarious matter, Biddy Tompkins, and I wish the poor boy well out of it."

Sammy's father, like some men who are arrogant in prosperity, but improve with adversity, was grave, silent and unusually gentle with the awkward squad on this early morning in the drill yard. He had not visited his disgraced son, now beyond his control or jurisdiction, who in fact had gained his majority in iniquity, nor had he any intention of putting in a

word in his son's favour with the officers, he would listen to their sentence without moving a muscle, yet for all that he was suffering as he had never done before, for duty had become his religion, and like all bigots with their special pet fetish he was ready to suffer martyrdom himself and sacrifice all that he held dearest for this engrossing passion.

He had been up at daybreak, indeed he had not turned in all night, but had promenaded his part of the barracks during the hours of darkness, while the sepoy regiments slept beside their arms in their bell-shaped quarters. Quiet enough they had all been after the last call had sounded from the bugles of the pickets for turning-in, although noisy enough before that warning, and this morning, as Major Waters had predicted, they had all fallen into their ranks docile as usual, if not quite so smiling and happy looking.

The recruits roused up for early parade looked quite startled at the instructor's mildness, for he had hardly sworn at them at all as they marched backwards and forward to his abstracted orders, while several mistakes had been allowed to pass with merely a despondent repetition of the movement ; it did not seem wholesome to those gawky, but sympathising young fellows to be treated in this fashion by the Havildar Sahib, and therefore a great sadness and listlessness fell over them, as they missed the familiar adjectives which on other mornings had given alacrity to their feet and arms.

"Morning, Tompkins," shouted the cheerful George Jackson, as he made his appearance along with Lieutenant Green, who was on duty, to which Sergeant Tompkins only nodded curtly.

"So that young imp Sammy has come home again?"

"Yes," replied Tompkins gloomily, with a flush of shame spreading over his thin, bronzed cheeks. "I am waiting to report him to the Major."

In his narrow sensitiveness he thought the entire army must be considering this escapade, and looking down upon him in consequence, and he felt humiliated in their eyes, while Jackson only laughed genially and passed on, thinking upon his own adventure of the previous night.

People in India rise early, and the barracks already presented an animated appearance as the soldiers and their families tumbled out to get their baths and little breakfasts, while the sepoys went through their customary routine of drill under the eyes of their Sabadars, Jamaders, Havildars and Naicks; a fine body of men they were, and proud of their uniform.

The great plain with the numerous ruins spread blue and hazy in the early morning mist, while beyond the bungalows rose the city walls, massive and impregnable, with the broad Jumna in front, and the numerous domes and spires behind and above the clustering gardens around which curled the thin smoke of a thousand household hearths, a fair scene, cool and dewy, for the flaming sun had not yet appeared to lick up the night moisture.

The upper space was also crowded with bird life; doves, crows, and hawks circled about close to the earth, while above them soared the hungry vultures waiting to begin their daily scavengers' work, and far away the omniscient eagles floated amongst the thin, sun-gilt clouds.

Just as the upper rim of the sun was lifting over

the tops of the cupolas, a party of young officers and civilians, with a sprinkling of ladies, on horseback, came cantering along the road towards the barracks, headed by Major Waters, all in bounding spirits and filling the air with gay laughter as they jested with each other about the night before ; they had been out on the plains and were returning to breakfast.

Many of the once faithful sepoys turned their dark faces with lowering brows upon this light-hearted party of equestrians as they rode past their ranks carelessly, while Sergeant Tompkins drew up stiffly before his Major and saluted.

"Well, Tompkins, anything to report this morning?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Tompkins sombrely.

"What is it, more grumbling amongst the men, or a fresh subject born to Her Majesty in the barracks?"

"Neither of them troubles, sir ; the men are as docile as usual, and none of the women have been misbehaving themselves ; it's about a deserter, sir, that was brought in last night whom I wish to report, sir."

This Roman father held himself as erect and emotionless as the guard may have done at Pompeii.

"Ah, a sepoy?" asked Major Waters, suddenly interested.

"No, sir ; a white man, at least he can't be called a full-grown man yet ; it's the drummer boy, Sam Tompkins, sir."

The Major, who was a good-natured fellow, burst into laughter, and then seeing the glow of controlled indignation on the stern face of the instructor, he became preternaturally grave, after a slight wink at his companions.

"You are quite right to report this defaulter at once, Sergeant Tompkins, discipline must be kept up, or the army will go to the dogs."

"Yes sir!" with another salute.

"Where is the little criminal?"

"In the cells, sir, where I had him conveyed last night."

"Then trot him out and we'll try his case without delay; place the big drum in front of me, and you, ladies and gentlemen, will be my court-martial."

Sergeant Tompkins called half-a-dozen of his recruits and marched them solemnly out of the yard, returning shortly with the deserter, whom they had roused from sleep and who appeared with the two days' dust still upon him, and rubbing vigorously at his half-opened eyes with his dirty knuckles.

"Where has he come from, Sergeant?" asked the Major sternly, while the ladies looked laughingly on.

"Meerut, sir! he was caught there by Corporal King and sent back under escort."

"Well, prisoner, what have you to say for yourself, for taking French leave of your regiment?"

Sammy looked round him for a moment sheepishly, but noticing with his quick eyes that there was more of amusement then condemnation in the faces round him, with the exception of his martinet of a parent, he plucked up his courage and saluted the court.

"Please, sir, I was on sick leave at the time and thought a little walk might do me good."

He held up his still bandaged hand to confirm his statement, when his father relentlessly broke in:

"It's a lie, sir, he was confined to barracks and under parole."

"But I didn't pledge my word, Sergeant, or I wouldn't have broke it." Sammy always addressed his father as sergeant.

"No, that's true, sir," admitted the conscientious parent. "The scoundrel did not pledge his word, now that I recall the circumstances."

"One point in the prisoner's favour," said the Major. "So you thought fit to take a little walk of forty miles for your health?"

"Yes sir!" replied Sammy demurely.

"And ——by Jove," the Major here noticed for the first time his large bloodhound, Hector, also dust-covered and wearied, as it limped up and lay down by the side of its young friend with a deprecatory air, and lurid yet sneaking side glances at its legitimate owner, as if it also wished to have its trial over for desertion.

"By Jove! Hector seems also to have been on the randan, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir, they went off together, but I did not think to report the dog."

"That was wrong, Tompkins, of you, for, as both have been guilty, they must be punished equally, my dog and your son!"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing at Meerut, drummer?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Sammy, hanging his head.

"Woman, sir—or leastways, a girl," snapped out the sergeant, at which there was a loud burst of laughter.

Sammy raised up his head with a flushing cheek; if he had done wrong he wasn't the boy to sneak out of it like a Hindoo.

'Yes, sir, that's what I went to Meerut for; my

sweetheart lives there, who I haven't seen for weeks, and being unfit for duty, sir, I thought it no harm to look her up; I didn't mean to desert, and that's the God's truth, sir!"

"But you should have asked leave."

"Yes, sir; I forgot."

"Are you engaged to this girl, prisoner?"

"Not exactly engaged. I haven't had time to ax her father yet, sir, but I'm dead-nuts on her, sir."

"Humph!—and your confederate there, what excuse has he for going to Meerut, eh? Has he also a sweetheart up there?"

"No, sir; we are chums, sir, an' Hector followed me out of company, as he mostly do; he was up to no harm, sir, so help me, an' neither was I for that part."

"And did you see your sweetheart?"

"Jest see her blooming face, an' no more, sir, when I wor arrested and brought back to Delhi on a byli; jest see her face, sir, through the garding fence, and wished her good-evening, when her old father comes up and puts a stop to all the rest."

"Ah! Well, ladies, what is to be the sentence of the court on this offender? He marches off without leave of absence to Meerut, thereby endangering the entire Indian army, all to say good-evening to a young lady."

"He ought to be made a corporal, I think," observed one of the fair judges, "for his devotion to our sex; I wager none of you gentlemen would do as much for me."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Finch," quickly replied the major, with an ardent side glance in the direction of the last speaker.

"Banish him from barracks for ten days, Major,"

suggested another. "Send him to Meerut under his parole; he deserves that punishment, at least, for his offence."

Sammy's eyes fairly sparkled as he turned two rows of white teeth in a broad grin upon the suggester.

"Capital idea, Miss Graham. Sergeant Tompkins, see that the prisoner gets his kit in marching order, and pack him off to Meerut by the first byli going there."

"Yes, sir."

"You understand, prisoner, that you pass your word as a soldier not to return to Delhi for the next ten days."

"Yes, sir; I give my word of honour this time, sir."

"And as for Hector, he must accompany you, also on parole. No, you disgraceful dog, don't try to apologise for your desertion, you must go with your fellow prisoner."

Hector, hearing his master mention his name, and with a dog's instinct that the worst of the row was past, had left his place in the dock and was wriggling forward to his master, but at the word of command he sank once more back on his haunches, with hanging head and slobbering jaws.

"The court-martial is over, ladies and gentlemen, so let us get on."

As the company trotted out of the yard, Sergeant Tompkins stood stiff as a ram-rod at the attention, and remained so until they were round the first corner, then he turned to his son with that parental expression which Sammy knew so well, and said:

"It's a God's blessing for you, sir, that you had not

the colonel sitting on you. Now, strip off your jacket and shirt."

And while his father went indoors for the familiar cow-hide, Sammy, after relieving his feelings with a somersault, removed his garments, and folding them up carefully as he had been taught, placed them on the ground beside the triangle, murmuring merrily:

"Ten days' fling at Meerut. Lor' bless me, I don't mind taking fifty straight off the reel for that sentence."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEPARTURE FROM DELHI.

THE native princes and land-holders were leaving the city for their distant homes, after spending the night in the Palace, or other lodgings provided for them within the walls, and, although it would have been more comfortable to begin their long journey at the early dawn, yet this did not suit their Eastern ideas of pomp and ostentation, while the army, out of compliment to their rank, had fixed to assemble in full parade and escort them for some miles upon their way

Therefore, it was nearly noon before the great procession, like an ideal Lord Mayor's show, began its slow and stately march through the densely-thronged main street of Delhi.

It was a holiday in the city, that is, the native merchants locked up their treasure-chests, there being no likelihood of customers, and the weavers and artificers left their workshops, while all who could hire a gari, ekka, palankeen, or even a byli or chinna-kundaka joined in the cavalcade, while those not so

fortunate, transformed shawls and mats into banners and marched with the pedestrians behind. Every bright-coloured article was utilized, hauled out and carried under that now burning fore-noon sun, along the Chandnee Chouk, and out from the wide Cashmere gates for miles along the dusty plains, until Delhi looked as deserted as Indraprasth, the ancient Delhi, generally does. All the world, as represented by this corner of the globe, was out on view.

The native army, headed by their English officers and the very few British non-commissioned officers and privates, were all assembled in full force, with the civil servants, pressmen, and ladies in their carriages. What a thin sprinkling of British representatives they looked as the sun lit up their white skins amid that vast ocean of Orientals and, although they did not yet know it, rabid enemies!

Nana Sahib, reclining on the silken cushion of his superb golden howdah, along with his most intimate followers, pointed out, from the great height of his mighty and richly-caparisoned elephant, with a light laugh, the scattered and detached white faces, and said:

"These are our present masters in Delhi. Lo! what confidence they have to stand before us like emeralds upon the gown of a poor Zemindar's favourite wife."

The Márathá chief when pleased, or acting a part, was one of the most affable and condescending of princes; he was indolent and good-natured, hating exertion excepting when roused by sudden passion, and, as the triple silken cord on his breast showed, he belonged to the most sacred caste of Brahmins, and therefore was priest as well as prince, so that his

affability was all the more marked. He was not witty or particularly happy in his figures, but he had what often passes for wit, the faculty of sly insinuation under a courtly and pleasant manner. On this morning he was pleased with the devotion and enthusiasm given to his double character as high priest and Peishwa by the Hindoo portion of the King's subjects, and therefore was inclined to be humorous and sarcastic.

"Truly they do remind me of the foam-flecks which I used to see on the dark billows of the ocean when there was a little wind," answered his protégé, Azim-Ullah, who, like all travellers, could not help drawing comparisons from what he had seen.

"And, like the foam-flecks, easily dispersed if we were a nation, as they are," replied Nana quickly; "but we are not a nation, therefore like the great waves with the foam we are content to let them ride over us, while we hold them up; look at the multitudes of dark faces around us, a thousand to one pale complexion, and the arrogance with which this thousandth part moves about, secure in the private jealousies and hatreds of the many races. It is well, Azim-Ullah Bahader, that I have laid down my pride and consented to fight with your people."

"Your Illustrious Greatness has proved your patriotism and lofty mind by doing so, as you did when you promoted me to be your faithful servant."

"My beloved friend, Azim-Ullah, not my servant," replied Nana, with a warm look in his dark eyes, as he placed his hand upon the shoulder of his young ambassador affectionately; "I could not cross the 'black water' to look at these hateful outcasts in their

own homes without defiling myself, but with you it was different, therefore you carried my eyes with you and brought them back faithfully, for which I am grateful. Yes, the holy cause of India is sacred enough to condone the sin which the high priest commits when he consents to fight under the banner of the Prophet."

"Would that these degenerate Rajahs who ride behind could be brought to see this also," remarked Tantia Topi, with an evil glance backwards at the procession, where the princes who had remained loyal to the British were riding along.

"Bah! they are only small sirdars and Zemindars who do not yet know the mind of Dandhu Panth," replied Nana carelessly. "When that is revealed they will come to us, and if they do not, we must tax them heavily for their lack of patriotism."

This portion of the procession had now passed through the city walls, where the Colonel waited at the head of his army, with his staff of officers, field pieces, and bevy of ladies in their carriages, and while the guns saluted the royal personages, Nana and Azim-Ullah rose to their feet and smiled as they bent their heads and waved their hands in response to the waving of handkerchiefs.

"These mem-Sahibs are dainty creatures, Khan Bahader, and generous with their charms. I wonder how they will like the change of masters? Ah, Ripley Sahib Colonel, you sit easily on your horse with your brave captains beside you; remind me, Azim-Ullah, if I forget, that yonder Sahibs Waters and Green, I think their names are, insulted me last night. I should like them to be spared and brought to me, if it can be managed."

The Prince was smiling, and nodding his gold-fringed turban in the most gracious manner towards the people he was speaking about, and who believed him to be the most loyal Maharajah who in this crowd of grandees stood under a shemianah.

"I shall not forget to remind your Royal Highness when the time comes," replied his follower with a musical laugh.

Across the Jumna by the bridge of boats the bright-coloured procession passed, with vast hordes of sight-seers crowding on either side, the highly trained and docile elephants with their velvet, gold, and jewelled coverings and radiant head-dresses, their long tusks gilded, and their massive trunks hanging meekly down, while the mahouts sat upon their necks and encouraged them along with endearing expressions, which the great beasts listened to with pleasure-twitching ears, for the driver is the elephant's friend and master, whom he alone serves with a love and devotion un-exampled. The great howdahs on their backs of solid gold, silver, or ivory, with the shemianahs or pavilions above to shade the riders, did not appear to inconvenience these obedient slaves as they slid easily and softly along with their heavy loads as if they had been feather-weights; the well-known voice of the beloved mahout beguiled them, so that they did not heed the crowd, or seem to hear the thunderous reports of field-pieces or belching muskets, or the clashing of the cymbals and blaring of the other instruments that filled the air with deafening sounds, the mahout's whisper alone reached their almost human brains; as it penetrated their twitching and

enormous ears, they seemed to be smiling with gratified vanity under their drooping trunks, and oblivious to all outside influences or distractions.

On foot came the attendants who held the cords of the canopy, with the servants of each elephant, a brilliantly costumed crowd, then followed the body-guard of cavalry in their glittering chain-armour with their polished shields and spears reflecting the glare of the forenoon sun, while the colour of each horse could hardly be seen under the rich harness and trappings with which it was covered.

The infantry of each chief followed after the horse; over a thousand men at arms followed the train of Nana, while other chiefs of less importance had with them hundreds of warriors and clansmen in their wake, glittering with gold and colour, and carrying bright banners and pennons on their lances, while the long-haired, gold-capped and silk-vestured musicians danced along, keeping time with their feet to the sounds they were producing with their fifes, trumpets, cymbals and tom-toms.

Nana Sahib, who with his retinue followed directly after the train of the king, knew very well that the royal salvoes were not intended to honour him, although he so graciously acknowledged them; while the old ex-emperor lay on the soft cushions of his howdah as if he had been in bed, with the silken curtains of the shemianah drawn closely round, so that he could not be seen, and half a dozen of his female slaves waiting upon him, a couple rubbing his feet and legs, while the others fanned and arranged the cushions for him, which were constantly getting disarranged by the rolling of the elephant.

The young son of his last favourite, the stout Zenát Mahal, had an elephant and state howdah to himself as the heir-presumptive, and was dressed in green velvet trimmed with gold and gems, while in his golden cap he wore an aigrette of precious stones; he thus perched above, like an over-dressed monkey, looking mighty self-satisfied, while his elder half-brothers followed after him on splendidly caparisoned milk-white horses, who showed their fine breeding and pride of birth by their tossing heads and capering heels, as they danced and pranced along to the danger of the closely packed pedestrians, over whose faces they scattered the white froth-patches like snow-flakes, which in their impatience they were constantly churning with their champing at their golden bits.

These disinherited elder brothers rode on impassively and sullenly, paying no heed to anyone, as if theywere performing a disagreeable and enforced duty, as they were, for although the oriental is an adept at hiding his emotion, it must have been gall and bitterness to see this young usurper sitting so placidly on his glittering height with all the guns blattering away in his honour, while they, like the deposed Lord of Bithúr, had to be satisfied with the back seats. Captain Douglas, the commandant of the palace, rode along at the head of the guard of sepoys, while with Sir Theophilus Metcalf, the magistrate of Delhi, were collector Hutchinson and Mr. Beresford, manager of the Delhi Bank, in a state carriage, followed by another containing the representatives of the *Delhi Gazette.*

The procession thinned out when they came to the

bridge of boats, and after they had crossed it, reformed in a more compact mass as they reached the dusty highway of the plains. Colonel Ripley gave the command for the troops to form a double line between the departing visitors and the multitude that pressed against them, while the covered carriages containing the wives and daughters of the English officers and civil officials fell into the ranks after their husbands, and helped with their varied and fashionable dresses to give variety to the oriental costumes. None of the ladies were allowed to use their parasols, as umbrellas were a sign of royalty only permitted to the direct members of the House of Taimur, but they all wore broad sun-bonnets and hats instead, which, with the canopies above the carriages, protected their fair flushed faces from the overpowering glare.

Poor ladies, as they leaned back faint and languid with the intense heat and tried to fan their fevered faces, while the dust covered their pretty dresses until they looked as grey as the sun-dried mud walls of the peasants' huts, they tried their hardest to smile and hide the weariness and vexation which filled their hearts as they longed once more for their shady rooms in the Bungalows, where they might lie at their ease and get their ayahs to comfort them ; but it was the correct thing for them to be there, so they endured the risk of sunstroke, swallowing choking dust instead of iced lemonade, and watching ruefully the ruin of their costumes with that martyr-like endurance which English ladies ever display when the stern calls of etiquette and fashion demand the sacrifice.

"I wonder how much farther we have to go with these wretched savages?" gasped Mrs. Finch to her

friend the commissioner's wife. "I shall die if we go on much longer; I am stiffling in my stays."

"It is awful," answered the other lady, "but I think it will soon be over, there is a halt to be called at the Kootub Minar, where the different chiefs will separate and take their own roads, then the show will be over and we can get back to our dens."

"Pray Heaven that order comes quickly, for I can't afford to lose much more and live," said the little siren with a heavy sigh.

Across the burning plain, like a great dusty oven, the cavalcade slowly crawled, an interminable ribbon of rainbow tints; its head was nearing that lofty monument, the highest in the world, Kootub Minar, with the Iron Pillar close at hand, and the majestic tombs of former conquerors still standing to attest their vanished pomp and greatness, while its flimsy tail of parvenues with their extempore banners was still traversing the Chandnee Chouk of Delhi.

A good-tempered and laughing multitude of natives poured along outside the lines of grandees and their military escorts, Fakirs and mendicants by the hundred plied their sacred professions of robbing the superstitious, snake-charmers with their cobras, and jugglers with their wonderful tricks and magical trees, diverted portions of the crowd, devotees tried their hardest to commit suicide by flinging themselves under the feet of the elephants or wheels of the cars as they rolled along, the noble beasts mostly defrauding these laudable intentions by removing the self-attempting victims out of their way with their trunks, while the sepoys drove them back from the wheels with their musket-butts.

The Tomb of Humaioon, composed of white marble, loomed up with his barber's monument of green enamel, also that of the Pathan Emperor with its rows of pillars, arches and domes inlaid with tiles of encaustic metallic colours of every shade, vast tokens these of the builders of ancient times, beside which the dome of St. Paul's would appear a pigmy, while nestling under the mightinesses were some native huts, dark trees and floating smoke.

They passed the copper-domed sarcophagus of the Saint, Nazim-ud-deen, with its exquisite carvings and fairy lattice-work marble screen, white-robed priests, constantly burning lamps under the canopy of rich drapery, the graves of the poet Chusero and that idealic daughter of the Shah Jehan, where the devotees were crowding in, regardless of the procession trooping along.

Like an invading army and amidst heavy clouds of dust they swept past the sacred bowlies or deep tanks where the divers shouted "Backsheesh" as they emerged drippingly from their deep dives—how the English ladies envied these semi-nude divers their recent dive, as they stood under the blazing rays with chattering teeth!

Through fields where the potters were digging the soft clay for the constant demand of the Hindoo customers, the long line of choking travellers wound, while the labourers left off their work to join the divers, fakirs and yogis in their craving for alms, awful objects of filth and neglect these holy mendicants were as they mixed amongst the citizens.

Picturesque groups of veiled women, with their water-pots on their heads and their brown-skinned

children by their sides, stood under the shadows of the sacred peepul-trees, india-rubber or date palms, to watch the show go along, while green pigeons and parroquets by thousands clustered amongst the branches or rose in clouds into the air as the clashing instruments or belching guns disturbed them. It was a marvellous picture of variety and colour, which almost compensated for its heat, that the travellers saw as they drove over this deserted city, startling game and birds of every description out of their retreats of magnificent ruins, mighty walls, gigantic forts, and once-time gardens now returned to jungle.

At last the Kootub-Minar was reached and the halt called for the final breaking-up of the procession, and here, under the shadow of that stupendous tower, the highest in the world, the regiments drew together, after going through a few manœuvres while the multitudes gathered up and pitched their camps, and then with a final royal salute and farewell volley from the muskets of the sepoys, those that chose could return to the city.

The sepoys and soldiers piled their arms and prepared to relax after their four hours of duty, luncheon baskets were hauled out by the baggage carriers and the contents spread inside the cool marble ruins of mosques and temples, which had gone through the defilement often before, since the English conquerors possessed the land, of having such forbidden delicacies as champagne and hock, brandy and soda, with potted ham, tongue and brawn brought within their once sacred portals, while the ladies, after shaking and brushing the dust from each other, once again became amiable to the gentlemen who sought their company.

Nana Sahib and his friends also dismounted from their travelling thrones and made themselves agreeable to the English section, for although they did not eat or drink with the conquerors, yet they chatted and smoked cigarettes, jesting with the men and paying elaborate compliments to the ladies.

The concourse of citizens who had ran amongst the dust were also lively and good-natured, so that this portion of the plain looked like an immense fair where tents and booths were hastily erected and the conjurer and snake-charmer were busy at their tricks.

Sergeant Jackson with Instructor Tompkins and the other non-commissioned officers had made themselves comfortable under a colonnade of many pillars, and were enjoying the lunch which their bearers had spread before them, Sergeant Jackson relating his adventure of the previous night and expatiating on the marvellous beauty of his unknown admirer, when a miserable looking fakir drew near and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Jackson Havilder Sahib?"

"That is my name, scare-crow," replied the sergeant, looking at his questioner carelessly.

"I was to give you this from one you know," continued the mendicant, holding out a packet of gold cloth tied round with silk, and as the sergeant took it a little doubtfully, the messenger turned away without waiting for thanks and hobbled down the steps.

The sergeant undid the fastening and on opening the gold wrapping discovered his lost emerald ring, which with a gratified laugh he placed beside the other on his little finger.

"As I said, boys, these rings should prove the truth

of my story, an emerald worth five thousand rupees if it's worth an anna, in spite of the curious cutting that's on it, with a ruby not to be sniffed at by a poor soldier; this other keepsake God knows the value of it, it may be a diamond or only a crystal, but she told me that it was a charm, and therefore, if that is true, it's worth the same price as my precious life, and that is something I reckon as far as this child is concerned."

He held out the two rings and the amulet as far as the chain inside his jacket would stretch for their inspection; the emerald was large and flawless in its exquisite colour so that the snake round it,with its ruby eyes, appeared to be coiling round a green and sunlit pool; the ruby gleamed like an immense drop of living blood; while the amulet was merely a black crystal-like stone with the upper surface smooth and the under side cut into facets of seven sides, and attached to the slender chain by two punctured holes.

"It is well to be young and good-looking, Jackson, in a land like this," replied Sergeant Tompkins slowly, after looking solemnly at the love-tokens, "and they may be the saving of your life, if the Thugs don't get at you in some of your midnight rambles. I remember when I was a young fellow like you, the Begum of——"

"We've all heard that wonderful yarn, Tompkins. At least everyone knows it excepting your wife, and if she did hear it she would swear that it was a pure invention; for although we all admire your pluck, it's very doubtful if you were ever young, and devilish improbable that you ever possessed looks enough to charm an ayah, far less a Begum."

"But you've seen the jewels I have at home, Jackson," observed the drill-instructor, in a tone of grave remonstrance.

"All loot, my boy, taken from the field of battle; you had the advantage of us youngsters in those early days."

"And, by the Lord, those days aren't over yet, or I'm greatly mistaken in the signs of the times," added Sergeant Tompkins cheerily.

"In that I go with you, comrade, although our officers don't appear to see it."

"Ah, they aren't amongst the men as we are, that's the reason for their blank confidence; they are bold fellows, and good comrades, these natives, when they aren't interfered with too much, but they want careful looking after just now, and they are not having it, so I am looking out for squalls presently."

At this moment the bugle sounded to arms, and the sergeants and corporals sprang to their feet, and left the shelter of the temple for the open field.

Shortly afterwards they were marching back with the household of Taimur in their centre, while the native princes and chiefs were moving on their different ways, south, east, west, and north. The troops marched quickly, while the elephants shambled along, covering the ground at a wonderful rate, for they were returning to their stables. So this day of peace drew to its close, and the sun once more went down like a glaring eye amidst an ocean of blood.

Book Second.—The Revolt.

CHAPTER I.

SAMMY TOMPKINS AMONGST THE THUGS

Drill-sergeant Tompkins did his parental duty to Sammy with a light heart which lent heartiness and force to the lash; in fact he laid on with energy before his trembling recruits, while the criminal did all the needful howling to impress upon his flagellator that he was suffering ten times as much as he really was, for no matter how brave a boy may be when beyond his parent's eye, he is ready to yelp like a mongrel pup the moment he is in that owner's hands.

So the game went on between sire and son, the passion-blinded sergeant thinking that he was hurting terribly that whip-hardened hide, and the son wriggling about so as to escape half of the strokes, while he shrieked as loudly when the triangle was hit as he did when the lash fell fair; he shrieked and writhed about so awfully that all the women of the cantonment came out, and amongst them his doting mother, reviling in a shrill chorus that duty-loving father as a monster incarnate, so that for very shame's sake he had to fling down his whip, and allow them to bear away the martyred boy. As this is the way Sammy's thrashings generally ended, after a sham whimper or two, he grew suddenly cheerful,

borrowed a few rupees from his mother, and began to wash and dress himself, preparatory to being removed to Meerut.

A couple of sowars were told off to see that the two prisoners arrived duly at Meerut, according to order, while a byli driver was commissioned to drive them up; by ten o'clock they were *en route*, Sammy with his jailers in the cart, and Hector, the lion-tinted bloodhound, fastened by a rope of straw to the axle, keeping time with the slow pace of the easy-going oxen.

Sammy was not a prudent boy. I am sorry to have to record, that while his mother was packing his kit, he went out to the canteen, and expended one of the three rupees which he had borrowed in a flask of army rum; with the other two rupees he bought a cheap necklace from a Hindoo trader, and a packet of very indifferent cheroots. He was swindled over the transaction by the wily Hindoo, for, having to dodge the watchful espionage of his father, he had not the leisure or composure necessary to haggle with a Hindoo merchant, therefore he made the sacrifice wilfully, and consoled himself with cursing the swindler's ancestors, relatives, and descendants through several generations, which the wily one took good-naturedly and smilingly, along with the rupees. A Hindoo can listen affably to a great deal of cursing when he is besting a customer.

Sammy had seen his escort told off, and felt pretty comfortable and certain that he could manage them, for he knew these men of old, as they did him.

Ahmed and Ram Dass were their names, representatives of the numerous house of Dass, which

in India is the equivalent to the English name of Brown; both were pet converts to Christianity from the strict religion of the Prophet. Most of the British converts bear this good old family name, and as the drill-sergeant was very rigid in his adherence to church, as well as other duties, he had fixed upon these humble favourites of the chaplain as the most suitable to look well after his scapegrace son on the road.

The sergeant arranged about the paying of the byli and driver, and not knowing what his wife had given already, bestowed upon Sammy what he thought would be necessary during his pilgrimage to Meerut, also a letter to his friend King, to look close after the morals of his heir, and see that he did not neglect his duty, or forget that he was a prisoner; this was supplemented by a letter from Mrs. Tompkins to Mrs. King, asking her to be kind to her poor boy, as he was in delicate health and on leave of absence.

Sammy had his mother's letter safely in his pocket unknown to his father, who had made the pious Ram Dass his postman, and that rupee had been expended in rum so that he might find the chance to substitute the letters, for both converts had taken kindly to all the tenets of their new creed, as far as the indulgences prohibited by the Prophet were concerned.

These two sowars had suffered a good deal of persecution at the hands of their brother sepoys for changing their original faith, for this is one of the points which the native soldiers are most rigid in reserving when taking service with the Faringhee, their right to worship as they like, and they resent any attempt at proselytizing more than any other in-

fringement upon their liberty, while a renegade is despised with loathing, as an outcast, past even contempt by both Hindoo and Mussulman; therefore it must be allowed that when a native becomes a Christian in India, he must be moved by strong conviction to do so, considering the suffering which he has to undergo.

Possibly Ahmed and Ram Dass, seeing how their tribe were already despised by the high-caste sepoys, considered it useless any longer to forego the pleasures of this world for a paradise where they were fated to occupy such an ignoble place, when by embracing the new creed, which promises a heaven to great and lowly on equal terms, and also demands no sacrifice of the good things below, they could be comfortable here and hereafter. To be orthodox to an Englishman does not offer the same bait as it does to a pariah sepoy, who for the first time in his life may hold up his head and feel a man—ergo, the missionaries are pretty sure of the outcastes in India, when they can make them comprehend what the reward is likely to be.

Ahmed and Ram Dass were really good and sincere converts, according to their lights; they attended church and prayer meetings regularly, said their prayers morning and evening with assiduity and earnestness, never ate or drank without repeating a fervent grace and returning thanks afterwards, and what is more, believed utterly in the faith which they had embraced.

They also did their duty conscientiously, and owned up their faults like men when old habits proved too much for their strength, repenting as

sincerely as did the Poet-King of Israel, and asking for strength to keep good resolutions quite as fervently.

But they saw that the sahib officers thought no harm in taking a tot of brandy or rum when thirsty; the chaplain even did not altogether refrain from the once-forbidden refreshment, while the mem-sahibs proved that there was no sin in a glass of wine; therefore these amiable proselytes considered that it was clearly their duty to follow such good examples, and drink when they had the opportunity also.

The opportunity did not come often, for their pay could not run into much indulgence, except when the like of Sammy was in the way with a spare rupee, also that their unaccustomed brains could not stand much was to be deplored, they frankly admitted, but not a sin to be repented of.

"By-and-bye we grow like the sahib-officers, and able to stand a good drink," they used to comfort themselves with, when put into the cells for their want of fortitude, and like heroes they never refused a drink when offered, or allowed the consequences to trouble their receptive minds.

As the byli rolled out of the cantonment, Sammy gave them a sly glimpse of his flask, which brought balm to their child-like hearts, and placed sunshine to their gentle and umbery complexions.

It was the opening of a fierce day of heat when they started upon their long and dusty journey, which grew in intensity as they progressed along, until Sammy could hardly lift his head, while the poor dog Hector suffered agonies and lolled his vermilion tongue out pitifully; but Ahmed and Ram had got

the flask between them and were happy as they rolled about their seat and trolled out monotonous ditties, while the driver sat like a stoic and pricked up his indolent cattle.

They passed many pilgrims, both going to and coming from Delhi, for the highway was well lined with pedestrians and drays, temples, huts and gardens also they passed, while the sun's rays beat down pitilessly upon them with a force which no imagination used only to English summers could realize. Before the mid-day halt, although both of his jailers lay ready victims to his hand, Sammy was too prostrate to avail himself of the opportunity to make the transfer of letters, he could only lie and gasp passively.

At last, when human and brute endurance had seemingly reached their utmost limit, they reached a spot about nine miles from Delhi, where an ancient temple with an oasis of trees offered them a grateful shelter. Here, as there was a large bathing tank in the temple precincts, Sammy decided to call a halt till night, when the cold moon would light them on their way.

They found five genial and merry fellows already camped when they arrived, who helped them to loose the oxen and place inside the temple the helpless sowars. Hindoo merchants these strangers were, going to Meerut to sell their wares, who made them all welcome to their retreat and promised to accompany them when night fell, for nothing with life in it except a snake or a lizard, perhaps, could venture farther in such weather.

Sammy loosed Hector, and after supplying him with

water enough to quench his thirst, went out to the tank and, to the admiration of these new friends, took a dive feet foremost from the platform into the depths of that cool tank, coming up much refreshed and ready for action.

The transfer of letters was easily accomplished while Ram Dass slept the sleep of the just, therefore Sammy could enjoy his lunch with a comfortable conscience, and afterwards his siesta, Hector watching over him meanwhile.

It was evening before he recovered his consciousness, a golden evening, with the plain outside luminous and the interior of the temple swallowed in obscurity. Ahmed and Ram Dass still lay like hogs where they had been placed, while the driver was nowhere to be seen.

Three of the five merchants were engaged in their devotions before the idol, which Sammy could just see vaguely in the gloom with which he was surrounded. They were praying in a language which he could not understand, although he knew two or three of the native dialects, therefore for a time he lay and listened passively, wondering all the while.

"Now what kind of lingo can that be that they're jabbering to their god?" thought Sammy; "it ain't Hindoo, nor Santal, nor Afghan, for I know them pretty well, but I'm dashed if I can make out more than a word here and there—ah! I know what it is now," he added after due cogitation. "It's slang talk which they've made up to humbug outsiders; they are secret society men of some kind, and I must watch these jokers and find out what they're up to."

Sammy, by association with Orientals, had a good

deal of the wisdom of the serpent about him in addition to his rollicking and merry ways; he was perfectly cognisant of the discontent of the natives and knew that there was a general rising talked about, but like his elders he did not believe that the sepoy could exist without the dominant white man, therefore he did not trouble his head much about the grumblings that he so often listened to, but a secret society in India meant danger to the traveller, as a cobra meant danger to those outside the sacred order of charmers; therefore, as he lay and listened to the strange jabber, he looked to his dagger-knife to see if it was handy for instant service. He might howl at his father's whip, because this was the only way out of that punishment, but in a predicament like the present it required a watchful eye and a resolute mind, both of which this drummer Indian-trained boy of twelve possessed.

"I wish I hadn't bought so much liquor for Ahmed and Ram, for they will lie like pigs for the next eight or ten hours, of no use to any one in a wrastle."

He lay and watched the genuflexions and ceremonies that the three merchants were going through at the feet of the goddess who presided over this secluded temple, within which much gore had been spilt in former times, but who at present was decorated in red paint to represent the blood-offering no longer given, for the place had long been deserted and left open for the unofficiated-over devotions of passing pilgrims.

One brazen lamp had been left in front of this neglected goddess, and as worshippers looked in they replenished it occasionally; it was lighted now and

burned dimly, revealing to the watcher heaps of refuse scattered about the floor, bones of old victims, with offerings of flowers and other cast-off treasures.

Sammy knew the temple he was under, with the name of the dread goddess who loomed out of the obscurity with her twelve arms and hands bearing the different weapons of punishment; there were three images of this goddess, the large centre one representing Kali with her tongue lolling out and the serpents twisting around her neck and head; on the right hand, she appeared again as Annapurna, the giver of good, with her child, Sanesha, in her arms, and under her feet the lotus flowers; and on the left, the smallest image of the three, she was Devi, the bright one, with her Madonna-like face, calm and inscrutable. It was Devi that the three Hindoo strangers were now trying to propitiate.

A flying fox came in through the open doorway, and after dashing about in front of the worshippers faces, clung with its talons to the naked left breast of the goddess, and remained there, head downwards, an incident which appeared to trouble the devotees very greatly, for a violent altercation took place between them, with frequent glances round to where Sammy, with the watchful hound, Hector, and the insensible sowars were lying; outside the twilight was growing green, while to the east the yellow moon was rising and lighting up the left side of the portal.

Presently two shadows darkened the doorway, one of which went towards the altar, while the other moved in the direction of the sleepers; then Sammy, seeing that it was one of the five strangers, rose and greeted him quietly in Hindostanee.

"It is about time for us to journey," observed the stranger. "Your oxen are yoked to the byli, had you not better take out the dog and tie it up as before?"

"Yes," answered Sammy quietly, calling on Hector, and going out with the stranger by his side. When they reached the outside he saw the byli ready for the road, but no driver.

"Where is the byli-wallah?" he asked.

"He has gone to the tank to draw some water," answered the stranger. "If you will fasten up the dog, which frightens me, I will help you to carry out the sowars."

Sammy did not quite like the look of affairs, but he was too wise to exhibit any apprehension, therefore he drew Hector under the carriage, and in a low whisper told it to "watch" while he pretended to tie it up, but in reality left it loose.

"Is the dog secure now?" asked the Hindoo.

"Yes," answered Sammy.

"Then let us go back to the temple. Lo! young Faringhee, some of your countrymen are coming up the road; do they come to join you?"

Sammy turned his back to look where the other pointed, when in a moment he felt as if a tiger had leapt upon him, bearing him face downwards to the ground, while at the same time a scarf of some kind was passed dexterously round his neck and drawn tightly with the full strength of the man above him.

Next instant another weight was added to that of the man, and then all at once both rolled off, while the cord grew suddenly slack, so that he could turn about and breathe once more.

One rapid, boy-like roll in the dust away from the

struggling bodies, and then Sammy was upon his feet, with his long knife drawn, looking for his assailant.

What met his eyes was a confused mass of silent writhing and raising of dust in front of him, with the uncertain lights of the dying day and moon commingling, and in a way spoiling each other, so that the boy decided to stand on his guard, and wait for the results of that violent tumbling about.

From three to perhaps eight minutes this miniature dust-storm went on, and then it gradually settled down, and Sammy could make out the bloodhound, Hector, not quite finished yet with the throat of the corpse that lay inertly under his tawny carcase, not quite finished, but almost, with his self-imposed task, for, even as the boy was giving his own neck a final caress to feel if it was not cut in any way, the dog drew himself away from the lacerated neck and chest of the dead Thug, and crawled over to the side of his chosen pal, licking his dripping jowls with a look in his lurid eyes, as much as to say, "Now, chummy, point out my next customer, since the last is served."

Sammy Tompkins had seen too many corpses in his time to sentimentalise over this fresh-made one, so, with merely a passing glance at the dark blot on the roadway to satisfy himself that the object was really done for, he drew down his jacket, and with his knife in hand and the hound at his heels he retraced his steps cautiously towards the open temple, where he had left his guards; from that expert attempt at strangling, he knew the company that he had fallen amongst, and resolved to have it out with them if possible.

But he had to walk warily, for it was one with a

dog against four desperate and crafty murderers; if he could wake up the sowars, good and well. With their muskets and bayonets they would be able to capture the gang, and carry them into Meerut; but, even if he had to work alone, he determined to do his level best to bring the Thugs in, and his duty as a "sodger."

Therefore, he kept well into the shadow side of the wall, and in this fashion got through the portal after a careful glance at the direction of the altar.

The lamp was still burning dimly, but the Thugs were not visible, and, at length, satisfied that they had left the building, he ran over to where he had left the intoxicated sowars.

They also were absent, while where they had been lying he found their regimentals and accoutrements piled up, down even to their shirts, then with a shudder he knew what had happened to these two poor converts.

He gave a low whistle to express and relieve his boyish feelings when he made this gruesome discovery, while he pondered on the next step to take. He now felt that the byli-wallah had been strangled and buried first, and that the dog had saved his own life during the afternoon as well as so lately, also, that while he had gone forth with his appointed intended executioner, the others had easily managed the insensible sowars; stripped them naked, flung down their clothes and arms with the full intention of returning for these perquisites after they had hidden the bodies.

"Hector, my boy, there is some work before us, I'm thinking, if we want to see our friends at Meerut," he murmured, and Hector gave a low sniff at the dead men's clothing, and prepared to follow the open trail.

Sammy might have slipped out and gone off in the byli, but such an idea did not occur to him; his only thought was to follow the burial party and catch them at their work, satisfied in his own mind that if a white man is the match of ten darkies, a white boy and a bloodhound might surely manage four; therefore, whispering to Hector to lie down for a moment, he slung round his shoulders one of the belts with cartridge and cap pouches, and lifting up one of the muskets which he tested with the ramrod, to find it loaded, he said cheerily:

"Now, lead on, Hector, my hero, I'm with you."

Hector at once rose, and putting his nose to the ground he went forward past the idols and through a narrow doorway at the back, which led to the garden where the tank was. The dog did not run fast, but looked round occasionally to see that his friend was keeping up with him.

Through the side door and into the garden they both passed. A perfect jungle they found here, where the walking was soft enough, and within which the moonlight only occasionally penetrated, leaving the rest dark, for it was now night.

Under a narrow avenue of date-palms and tangle the dog and his friend ran without a sound, until Sammy saw in front of him an open patch with the four assassins hard at work shovelling in the loose earth upon the bodies of their victims; then, for the first time, Hector gave out a deep bay, startling the grave-diggers, which they had barely heard before the selected antagonist was on his back with the relentless jaws at his throat, while the others threw down their spades and prepared to fly.

"Halt and surrender, for you are surrounded," bawled out Sammy, in the deepest voice he could muster, while he covered one of the band with his borrowed musket, and at the word of command the three convicted wretches looked round wildly, but made no further attempt to fly, while the fourth was having his death-struggle on the grave he had been filling.

"Lie down on your faces while I call off the dog, and do not stir for your lives, or you will be fired into," again shouted the sham-bass voice. And the trembling Thugs lay down as desired, shutting their eyes and ears so that they might not see or hear that terrible fight going on over the new-made grave.

Then Sammy laid down his musket, while, knife in hand, he went over to the prostrate figures, leaving Hector to finish his man unmolested.

Kneeling down by the first one, in a trice he had his waistband off and his arms firmly braced behind his back; this operation he repeated with the other pair, and then he turned towards Hector to find that he had effectually polished off number two, and was getting ready to select another from the gang.

"Down, Hector, down!" he shouted sternly, and the well-trained animal slunk immediately at his heels.

"Now, prisoners, to your feet, and march this way."

Sammy had gone back for his musket and was waiting for them in the avenue, so with doleful faces these murdering devotees passed along through the avenue and temple with their captor in their rear, encouraging them along with an occasional prod of his musket.

He paused to pick up the other musket and the regimentals of his murdered friends in the hall, and then accompanied his prisoners out to the cart, into which he made them scramble one after the other, while with the straw rope he also bound their ankles, and then, warning them once again to lie quiet or Hector would be at them, he sprang to the driver's seat and set the oxen in motion, chuckling all the while at his easy victory.

He had, however, no need to warn his prisoners to keep quiet, for the sight of their dead companion on the road, with those terrible fangs so close in the rear of the cart, had quite convinced them that the days of their peculiar devotions were over, their hearts had become as water.

"I knew that we would fail, brothers, with the omens against us," groaned one of them as he lay amongst the straw, while the other two echoed that groan with heavy sighs.

All night they travelled at as fast a rate as the oxen could be driven, nor did Sammy stop the next day in spite of the appalling heat until he had passed the walls of Meerut, then, faint and played-out, he delivered his captors into the hands of his father's friend, Corporal King, to take on to the prison, while he was taken indoors to the bungalow by the kind-hearted mother of his sweetheart Nelly, and had the supreme delight of hearing himself called a hero, by both her parents and the officer who came to take down her report, all before Nelly, who looked at him admiringly out of her rich brown eyes, while she put his necklace round her slender neck with a pretty blush of pleasure.

Then I think Sammy, for the first time in his young life, fainted, although he afterwards swore that he only fell asleep, he was so "blooming fagged out with his long drive!"

CHAPTER II.

MRS. FINCH AT HOME.

MRS. EUGENIE FINCH was a sweet-faced, rather than a strictly beautiful, little woman, of the fragile and lily order of beings; her complexion was always pale, yet always exquisitely clear, over which a most becoming flush would steal at odd moments as if to inform the onlooker that there was nothing artificial about that porcelain-like purity of tone, that delicate rose-blush which would creep from chin to brow and back again with an effect which was very charming, as the little gentle-voiced siren knew.

Her eyes were dove-coloured, and dove-like in the tenderness of their expression, her nose slightly tip-tilted, but so well shaped and fine that it only added to the all-pervading tenderness, deliciously curved and smiling lips, with a small round chin, oval-shaped face and a brow low and broad, surmounted by a mass of wavy and golden brown hair. She had no cause to look much abroad for admirers, for her reception-room was generally pretty full of male friends, who were ever ready to pour into those small and shell-like ears the pleasure that her society gave them.

She dressed exceedingly well for her position, which, by reason of her husband's length of service in the East India Company, was equal to that of a major's

lady in the ranks, so that the men liked to be seen in her company on the "maidan," or mall, while as she was the chosen friend of the religious female leaders of Delhi society, the ladies who liked to study her fashions came constantly to see her in spite of a great number of reasons which, strictly speaking, ought to have kept them away, but when one is fashionable what might banish the less favoured seems to be passed over lightly by society.

She had good conversational gifts, but was never sarcastic, malicious or back-biting in her remarks, a good confidential friend, and when speaking, always looked straight in the eyes of her *vis-a-vis* gravely and earnestly, thereby leaving the impression that they were worth speaking or listening to, which is a rare and great gift in either woman or man.

She did not care very much for children, that is her own children, and made no pretence about the matter, but left her two daughters entirely under the care of the ayah and governess, and never permitted them to intrude when her visitors called, which was another point in her favour in the eyes of her gentlemen friends, for as they said:

"There's no dashed humbug about Eugenie, and no confounded brats trotted out for inspection and sugar-balls when we drop in."

In the mess-room she was always spoken about as Eugenie by the men, and there was no such thing as trying to cut out the reigning favourite while he was in favour with this little queen; they acted like loyal brothers-in-arms in this respect, and waited patiently until the friendship came to an end, or rather until the prime favourite resigned his special claim, and

entered the ranks of her general admirers, of whom she had plenty.

No one had ever been known to quarrel with or about pretty little Eugenie, she could get on with them all, and was always spoken well of by her friends as a "charming little woman, whom you will be delighted to know."

New-comers generally ran after her pretty closely for a month or two, as Major Waters was doing at present (who had come lately to Delhi from Barhámpur), after which they seemed to settle into the cool and faithful adherence of the others; no one ever jested about her to his friend, while with one and all her husband was received courteously and frankly, as a brother might have been; indeed, as far as their friendship with Mrs. Finch was concerned, they all agreed in united yet calm praise, as in an orderly and well-conducted Zenana, the ladies are supposed to live in calm harmony with each other, and without the slightest ruffle of jealousy disturbing the even and justly-apportioned harmony of their placid lives.

Very young men sometimes lost their heads about this delectable creature, and seemed inclined to make a disturbance, as they might do over the rate of charges or cuisine of their fashionable clubs, but the elders promptly sat upon them, and with a few severe remarks restored their lost equilibrium to them, as the veterans of clubs sometimes have to treat the young branches with such words, "If you grudge the price or don't think the fare worthy of it, why, then, clear out and leave it alone."

Mrs. Finch was very attentive to the religious observances of society, and thereby gained the warm

partisanship of the chaplain and the religious section of Delhi. She took a deep and lively interest in the chaplain's pet foible—the half-caste children's home and Sunday school—and not only gave substantial donations to this and the missionary cause, but conducted a class on Sundays so smoothly and untiringly that the pupils positively adored her. She was also the most attentive and regular of the chaplain's congregation, and never was absent from her post, no matter how oppressive the weather might be. As this reverend gentleman and astute reader of characters was wont to remark, "That meek and lovely face inspires me in my labours. I am sure of one listener, whoever else may be absent from the service, and that assurance consoles me for many mundane worries."

At Mothers' meetings she was to the fore also, so that the ladies who believed in the regeneration of the ignorant heathen used to beam upon this fair worker and remark, behind her back, "Do you know, my dear, I don't believe one of the stories which are told about dear Eugenie Finch; it's her own sensitiveness and kindness which mislead evil-minded people."

And yet, although her male friends never grumbled, there were many ugly rumours bandied about the barracks amongst the common lot as to her goings on. The sepoys also pointed her out with their tongues in their cheeks when she went past so fresh-looking and amiable, sepoys who had been intimate with her domestic servants and ayahs; and officers who had come out to the service flush of money, in the strict privacy of their rooms were wont to look ruefully into their bank-books after the period of prime favouritism had been gracefully resigned, and murmur savagely

inside their moustaches something about a "insatiable little hypocrite of a harpy." But they got over this fit after kicking their servants about for a few weeks and retrenching expenses generally, and then they could afford to watch with affable smiles of indulgence the doings of the new "masher," while this dove-eyed little friend of the Army and Church went on her calm and earnest way of devotion and friendship.

The bank manager was also very respectful to her, and spoke about her managing habits with great unction and admiration, while her husband was never dunned in her behalf or badgered by her about money matters. He allowed her a regular sum for domestic purposes and dress, and she never exceeded that sum, although she managed to dress so much better than other wives in her position, so that he also was satisfied with his bargain, and echoed the praises of the bank manager.

She had come out to India purely on speculation, some said as the hired companion of a Calcutta official's wife, and that it was while in this embryo state that she had charmed the liberty away from John Finch. Certainly none of the ladies knew what family in the old country she belonged to, and she never boasted about her parentage, so that no one could challenge her or make her uncomfortable. She was much better educated and informed than most of the wives around her, and her husband appeared thoroughly satisfied with her antecedents and behaviour, so that no one else had any right to complain. As the veterans remarked, "If they did not like it they could leave it."

John Finch was a tall, thin, well-preserved man of

about fifty, who had been in the service for many years, who knew his way about, and had a keen eye for the main chance. Having chosen his partner, he acted like a chivalrous husband and trusted her, while even the household, those harsh critics, had to own that there were no domestic bickerings to disturb the harmony. He went to his daily routine of duty with a morning salute, and returned to find the same affectionate greeting, while during the interval of his absence his wife received his friends, male and female and sustained his reputation as a kindly host; and, as we have already seen, they were not a mawkish couple who played Darby and Joan in company, but good, considerate friends, as fashionable husband and wife should be.

It was the day after the exodus of the native princes, and Mrs. Finch was reclining on the sofa in her boudoir, with the fragrant khas-khas grass mattings inside the door, and the window constantly drenched with water, while the punkahs were being swung by the unremitting servants. Sometimes one of the punkahs would stop for a moment and then go on again. A slight interruption this was, and only caused by the sudden death from sunstroke of the wallah outside who worked the machinery, and easily remedied in a land where labour was so cheap.

In a few minutes the punkah would resume its even swing overhead, while the fresh worker took the cord from the hand of the dead one, and the corpse was hauled away out of sight.

This boudoir was very twilighty in its effect, and, despite its cool appearance, felt like the hot room of a Turkish bath for heat; and the little lady was languid

even in her remarkably thin cashmere morning robe. Her husband had just left her for his daily duties and she was expecting one visitor to-day, to wit, Major Waters, the still infatuated.

"His money must be running short, I am afraid," she murmured pathetically to herself as she waited. "Strange that no one rich enough ever comes to Delhi. I fear I must put him on the general staff after to-day. Amorah!"

"Yes, Mem-sahib," answered the obedient ayah as she appeared in the doorway.

"When Waters-sahib comes show him in here, and say I am ill to all other callers; it is too hot to receive many callers to-day."

"Yes, Mem-sahib."

A short time after this the fascinating Major is shown in, his thin silk shirt drenched with perspiration and himself gasping with the supernatural heat of his drive; as he enters, the temperature rises perceptibly, while with a groan he sinks into the rocking-chair at her side.

"Amorah."

"Yes, Mem-sahib."

"A glass of iced brandy and soda. You will take this, I fancy, Major?"

"I could drink the ocean dry to-day, my dear Mrs. Finch."

"You are hot, my poor friend," cooed the sympathetic voice softly.

"Awfully, madam, awfully."

The iced drink was brought to him in a long tumbler, after which the discreet ayah silently disappeared. Then came a pause, during which the

gallant Major imbibed, while his hostess watched him with kindly solicitude.

"Eugenie, my darling"—he made an effort and dropped on his knees beside her, bending his face towards hers.

"Isn't it rather warm to-day, Bertram dear?"

"You are right, Eugenie. Yet who can help themselves when before you?"

Being on the cool, clean matting, he stayed there, stretching himself listlessly out, while the little siren passed her delicate fingers tenderly through his hair; cool and mesmeric fingers they were, which soothed him and rendered him dreamy as he lay with his head on the edge of the low sofa, feeling almost like a Rajah in his zenana.

"I want to talk seriously to you, Bertram, and perhaps ask your advice," murmured the voice of the soother.

"Yes, Eugenie, go on."

"I am afraid that I have been too extravagant of late and have taxed my friend too severely."

"Don't mention that matter, dear, I am expecting some remittances presently, when all will go right."

"But, dear, you are short at present, although you will not say so. Tell me all about it, Bertram, and if——"

"Hush, child, I have two thousand rupees still to the good. What are you speaking about? Next month I may have twenty thousand more."

"Ah, Bertram, I am so sorry."

"Why, Eugenie?"

"Bertram, I have always been frank with you; who should I be frank with if not with you?"

"Who indeed?" the infatuated one murmured, as he lifted himself far enough to imprint a kiss on her lovely arm.

"Well, Bertram, it is about my husband, a good, dear fellow, but reckless and generous to a fault. He has a bill coming due to-morrow, and—and—he is in such distress about it, that I can hardly bear to witness the misery it causes him."

"How much is this bill for, Eugenie?"

"Ten thousand rupees."

"Ah! Sorry it's beyond me; if I could, you know me of old, how gladly."

"He could renew it, I believe, for two thousand rupees," murmured the soft-voiced one gently.

"Then be consoled, my child. I'll send you a cheque when I get back to barracks. But tell me, are you not awfully soft with this husband of yours, who is so constantly getting into debt?"

"Bertram, why ask that question? Of course you know that I ought to be as kind to him as I can be, for what are his faults compared to mine?"

There was a world of reproach in the dovelike eyes as they fixed themselves on his, while the blushing face stooped over him. All at once he felt his own meanness, and grew ashamed of his unworthy suspicion.

"Forgive me, Eugenie, I shall never doubt you again."

"That's right, Bertram, for I never forget any of my friends, while with one like you——"

The servants outside threw fresh water on the scented matting, and caller after caller left their cards at the door, while the sun travelled a little farther

round on its daily course, when some time before two o'clock the infatuated major once more drove back to the barracks to enjoy his bath, with numerous cigars and iced brandies with soda, and afterwards write out his last cheque on the Delhi Bank.

"What a delightful little woman she is, to be sure!" he murmured, as he wrote the cheque out and sent his servant round with it. "Not a thought about herself—all for her husband and her friends! Only I must give up the pleasure of being her most confidential friend, for she is too unfortunate in money matters—at least, her husband is, while she is too good and tender-hearted even to him; so with this last I must draw up and leave the game to young Green. There is no dashed mistake about it, though, the little woman loves me—

"'It's for the lack of pocket-money, it's for the want of cash,
That makes many a soldier's boy leave his winsome lass.'"

Murmuring which, the major lit his cigar and sank down in his sitz-bath to enjoy himself, satisfied that he would always hold a tender place in the heart of Mrs. Finch which filthy lucre could not reach, and this was the secret of that little lady's popularity. Stern necessity had drawn most of her friends back for a time, but they each felt sure of a welcome when they could afford to come again.

Inside the boudoir the lady is comforting herself with a few kickshaws in the form of tiffin, while she cogitates to herself:

"The Delhi Bank is quite safe, and the major only confirms what the manager and others say—there will be no rising here. Amorah."

"Yes, Mem-sahib."

"Who called to-day while I was engaged?"

"Lots, Mem-sahib; their cards are below. The Chaplain-sahib called also with Mem-sahib Mortimer."

"Oh, what a pity that I did not see them! Did they know that anyone was here?"

"No, Mem-sahib, unless the sahib was seen to leave."

"Ah, that may be. Quick, Amorah, dress me! never mind the bath to-day. I must leave my card with the Chaplain and Miss Mortimer before it is too late."

The little woman sprang actively from her couch, and in ten minutes was outside, on her way to the Chaplain and the pious but melancholic Mrs. Major Mortimer.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLUNDER OF MEERUT.

THE church bells had stopped ringing for some time and evening service was just beginning at St. John's, Meerut, when a strange figure rushed unceremoniously half-way up the centre aisle, and stood gasping and panting before the fashionable congregation, as if he had run a long distance, and was, for the time, rendered speechless with dust, heat and intense excitement.

Most of the congregation looked round with surprise at this rude intruder, a congregation made up from English officers, soldiers, and their wives and children; indeed, many of them rose up angrily in their seats, while the clergyman paused, prayer-

book in hand, and with an indignant flush on his face; for the intruder, at first sight, appeared to be a common sepoy, who had been having a day of it, and was showing up before this respectable congregation with his regimentals in tatters, and only a portion of these left on.

A young sepoy, of about fifteen at the most, with a pair of blood-shot and staring china-blue eyes, starting from the brown skin; a closer look, however, at this tattered and half-naked scare-crow convinced those nearest to him that he was no native, but rather a white boy, who must have painted his face brown and dyed his scrubby, bullet-head with the blacking-brush, for the perspiration ran down in rivulets, carrying portions of the black and brown with it, and revealing streaks of straw-tinted hair, and flushed, ruddy cheeks; his breast and arms, which were bare to the waist, with portions of his limbs, showed up whitely, except where the fresh-made and bleeding scars broke on the whiteness.

A grotesque and ghastly appearance he presented in that sedate church, as he swayed to and fro, begrimed and gory, full in the sight of all those good people glaring at him, one dirty fist clutching at his left breast, to stop the beating of his heart, and the other holding a dripping bayonet.

Corporal King, who, with Nelly and her mother, sat in the seat against which this spectacle had paused, rose up promptly and, seizing the intruder firmly by the naked shoulder, in spite of his white gloves getting stained, began to push him along:—"Come, get out of this, you miserable baboon"—when all at once he dropped his hand, startled at the

yell which burst from the gasping lips, as the boy at last found his voice.

"I ain't going out of this, until I've said what I've got to say. I'm Sammy Tompkins, and I've run, with a gang of sepoys after me, from the cantonment, to tell you that the 11th and 12th Bengalees have rose to a man, while the 3rd are galloping about like devils, and raising Cain all round."

Sammy had a pair of first-rate lungs, for he was a strong boy, so that his words rang out like a bugle-blast, and filled every corner of the building, striking the congregation with consternation, from the white-haired old General Hewitt to the youngest subaltern.

For a few minutes the wildest confusion reigned in the church; the door-keepers clashed the outer doors together and locked them, the women and children broke loose and rushed from their seats towards the altar, screaming loudly, while the General and his staff surrounded Sammy and poured a torrent of eager questions at him.

"Where are they? What are they doing?"

"They were swarming into the town and breaking down the jail when I come away. Yesterday, when I saw what had been done to their comrades, I heard their talk and knew that there would be trouble come out of it; so I rigged up this morning like one of themselves and spent the day amongst them."

"Then why didn't you come sooner with your report?" demanded the old General angrily.

"I couldn't get away, sir; they found me out 'cos of my blue eyes, and kept me prisoner until dark, when I dodged them and got off with a wrastle, as you may see for yourselves; but, for God's sake,

General, don't wait to ax me any more questions, or there won't be an Englishman left alive in Meerut; they have sworn to massacre the blooming lot, men, women and kids, afore morning, and they'll do it too, if you ain't lively."

Sammy was not speaking as he ought to have done to his superiors, but he had no time to pick or choose his words.

General Hewitt had grown old and hoary in the service of the East India Company, and knew, or thought that he knew, the sepoys as well, and better, than he did his own countrymen; besides, he had lived too long under those enervating suns to hurry himself for anyone, therefore he turned calmly to his staff, after hearing what the boy had to say, and remarked calmly:

"There is nothing to be alarmed about, gentlemen. I have seen disturbances like this dozens of times, and they are easily quelled. Form marching order with the women in the centre, and get them back to barracks, whilst you go and talk to the mutineers, Colonel Finnis.

None of the military had any other weapons with them except their side arms, but these they drew, and, after a considerable delay, the church doors were thrown open and the congregation came outside, where they formed a marching square, and began to move through the streets towards the barracks, where the horses and arms were.

At this part of their journey the streets were for the time deserted, although distant shouts and cries, mingled with trumpet-calls, the roll of drums, and discharge of musketry, announced where the muti-

neers were assembling; they could not but notice also that their native servants, who should have been waiting for them, were all absent from their duty, while not a citizen could be seen.

Sammy marched along by the side of his sweetheart and her mother, determined not to lose sight of them. As yet he had not had much time for love-making, owing to several causes; first, as it was Friday afternoon when he arrived, he had been forced to spend the remainder of it in bed, under doctor's orders, as the heat had brought on a slight fever.

On Saturday there had been the general parade, while the mutineers who had refused the cartridges, were marched up before their comrades, stripped of their accoutrements, publicly disgraced, and afterwards ironed and conveyed to the gaol, which lay two miles distant from the barracks, and which was guarded by natives only; it was here that the revolting regiments and mob were gathering in force.

Sammy, having been brought up with the natives, knew their natures a great deal better than most men, even though they had lived years beside them, and while sorry to see the brave 3rd Light Cavalry so heavily punished for their religious scruples, for they had all long sentences passed on them by the court martial, he was startled to notice the sullen looks and sympathetic glances of the other native regiments while on parade, and afterwards, when he listened to their open threats of vengeance.

Therefore, laying love for the present aside, he had darkened his face and hair, and thus disguised passed the Saturday and Sunday in the native quarters; by four o'clock on Sunday afternoon he had learnt quite

enough of their plans, but found himself a prisoner in their hands, so that he could not get away before sunset, when they were already on the move.

He got away at last, as none but a strong and daring boy could have done, at the risk of his life, and many bruises; knocking down the sepoy who held him, breaking loose from the others who clutched on to him, and leaving most of his borrowed clothes and bits of his skin in their hands instead, and afterwards trusting to his light heels, so he had reached the church at last, late enough with his intelligence for the slow ears he had to give it to.

It was half-past seven before the church party reached the cantonment, where they found Colonel Custance with his Carabineers waiting for instructions, while already the flames from distant mansions and bungalows were beginning to shoot up luridly to the dark and sultry night; from different points these flames broke out, showing where the rebels were devastating.

Colonel Finnis and a few of his brother officers had meantime ridden off to harangue his own regiment as he was ordered, and while the Carabineers waited instructions, the general went into his own quarters to hold a further council.

While they were yet consulting Sammy had gone with the Kings to their cottage, and re-dressed himself hastily, arming himself with a brace of pistols and a carbine, then he rushed outside, the black still on his face, but more equally distributed by the towel he had used in his hurry, so that he had something of the appearance of a half-caste.

At this moment he saw one of the officers who had

gone with Colonel Finnis, gallop back, wounded desperately, with the news that the others had been riddled with balls and hacked to pieces by the infuriated mob.

This disaster, being communicated to the general, seemed to wake him up a little, for he sent out orders for Colonel Custance to ride with his Carabineers to the gaol, and protect that place, while he himself, with Brigadier Wilson and others of his staff, appeared and ordered out the 60th Rifles and the Artillery.

Meanwhile in Meerut, which they had left totally unguarded, the flames were rising fast and furious, so that the country was lighted up for miles with that crimson glare, while black clouds of smoke rolled up and hung about the town ; still the general ignored these significant warnings and gave the command for the regiments to move to the general parade ground instead.

Sammy could not rest although he followed the army in their useless march, he wanted to be back to the town, where all the excitement centred, as did most of the others.

On the parade ground none of the mutineers could be seen, and another consultation was called, when it was decided that Brigadier Wilson should return with his company for the protection of the barracks, while after a little skirmishing along the Delhi road the old general gave the order for his force to bivouac for the remainder of the night on the parade ground.

Sammy returned with the Artillery to the barracks. On their way back they saw that the rebels had been busy with the bungalows which were blazing, while most of the unprotected inmates had been murdered,

and left on the road-side; women and children caught up as they attempted to escape, and brutally done to death, while only a few managed to hide themselves with the aid of their still faithful servants. The piteous tales of these few of what they had witnessed, made the blood boil in the veins of their hearers.

Sammy could stand it no longer, it wasn't in his nature to wait inactive in the barracks where all was safe; so he once more went into his quarters and plastered himself afresh with the umber and blacking, only this time smearing over his arms and legs as well, then with a shawl twisted round his body, and a large handkerchief round his head by way of a turban, he seized his former weapons and stole silently away to the burning town.

He had no difficulty in finding his way about, for the moon was now up and the houses were burning fiercely, while with the mob of howling and murdering desperadoes and gaol-birds, who had been liberated, with his fluent command of the language he could mix amongst them without suspicion, for they were all too busy hunting down the Europeans and gathering loot to heed his movements.

He could do little or nothing for those who were being hunted down, although in some cases he managed to turn the attention of the rabble aside and so helped the faithful servants to smuggle their masters and mistresses away, but these instances were few and far between; the chances he sought and found were isolated cases, where some ruthless scoundrels had been left behind by their companions, these he dis-

patched with his knife as callously as if he had been a professional murderer.

He grew blind and drunk with the reckless fury of the carnage he was himself committing, and the butchery and wanton destruction which he saw around him; mangled corpses of Europeans and Eurasians were lying exposed in every direction, with the smashed-up furniture of their demolished houses scattered amongst them, gardens trampled down and the poor wretches who had striven to hide there, mutilated horribly. Mothers with their families slaughtered and pitched carelessly one over the other, young girls and wives lying stark and naked, with the headless bodies of their brothers and husbands beside them, and the forked flames spouting out of the houses from which they had been dragged, and lighting up the horrid spectacle.

The carnage had only really commenced by the time he reached the hellish rabble, for the rebel sepoys were still amongst them encouraging them on, having liberated their comrades as well as the other convicts from the gaol, while General Hewitt and his forces were calmly bivouacking on the parade ground almost within hearing of the death-shrieks of those helpless women and children, within hearing of the murderous volleys from the muskets and the exploding of the combustibles, as the military station of Meerut was being demolished—this general with a body of men strong enough to have protected and saved the many European lives sacrificed, and stopped these rebels, lay calmly sleeping and waiting for morning to reveal to him the awful enormities and waste of property, without even a thought entering his senile mind to warn the Delhi authorities in time.

Sammy came upon a party of the sepoys carousing in the square, and seeing that they had handed over the work of destruction to the undisciplined mob, he asked one of them what the next move was to be.

"Delhi, my son, where we will continue this game on a big scale. You have done well to-night I can see," glancing at his blood-stained arms and knife. "If you can ride you had better join us, for we will start presently."

"I can ride, but I have no horse, comrade," replied Sammy.

"There are plenty of good horses waiting for new masters, which belonged this morning to the accursed Faringhees; come with me and I'll find you a mount."

And the obliging sepoy rose and walked towards a wall where over fifty horses were tethered ready saddled.

"How does this one suit your lordship?" asked the ex-3rd Cavalry-man jocosely, as he laid his blood-stained hand on the neck of a good-looking grey. "It is little, but possessed of good wind and swift legs, and I bet you a rupee to an anna, with a small fellow like you on its back, that it won't be the last to reach the Cashmere Gates to-morrow morning—for I have seen its paces on the race-course."

Sammy had been overhauling the animal's points carefully while the other was speaking, and decided that it would suit his purpose, which was to get in front of the rebels and warn the threatened city of their approach.

"Yes, that horse will content me; now, comrade, if you will lead me to your officers, I'll join your ranks."

"Officers. Ha! ha!! We are our own officers

for this night; when we reach Delhi we will offer our services to the King, so jump up, my son, for I see, our lads are ready for the road; these dirty dogs will finish the work here that we have begun for them."

As they mounted they could see a swarm of the scum rushing along a side street with several European heads stuck aloft on stakes and spears. A dirty and disreputable pack of pariah dogs they certainly were, as they rushed along with almost nude bodies and horrible-looking dark faces, within which the eyeballs and teeth gleamed as they gnashed the last and rolled the former about in search of fresh victims.

Many were carrying flaring torches and burning brands along with their other weapons, while all looked as if they had been wallowing in human blood as they left the long-reaching track of flames, outrage, and death behind them.

"These outcastes can smell out Faringhee better than we can, brother, for they have been beggars at their gates all their lives, so that we have little fear to leave them by themselves; and a man will be able to count quite easily on his fingers the Faringhees who will live to see to-morrow's sun rise."

Sammy looked at the rushing mob of human beasts as if he would have had much pleasure in emptying his pistols amongst them, but he thought better of it, as he considered how much he might yet require his bullets for his new companions; then with a farewell glance at the scene of desolation he was leaving, a groan for the parole he was about to break, and a doleful sigh for the little girl he had hardly had an hour beside, he braced up his young soldier's

heart at the glory which would be his if he could only be the means of shutting the gates of Delhi in the faces of these rebels, he gave the reins to his fiery little steed and galloped down the fire-illumined streets alongside of the once renowned but now for ever disgraced 3rd Native Cavalry.

CHAPTER IV.

MAJOR MORTIMER FINDS A SECURE PLACE FOR HIS PIPES.

THE gracious dawn of Monday the 11th May, 1857, woke up many a good and noble woman from the uneasy slumbers which a hot night, mosquito-haunted, is apt to cause even the most innocent and virtuous of people to suffer from, as well as the guilty-minded, but I doubt if a more truthful, simple or more honourable mind, despite a few eccentricities, resumed its reasoning faculties on this morning in Delhi, than was that of Mrs. Letitia Mortimer, as she opened her still beautiful eyes, and turned her paper-knotted head with a rustle on the pillows towards the bald portion of her sleeping husband's cranium.

"Oh! Mortimer, I have had such a horrible dream."

Major Mortimer woke up with a start and a growl, while he answered, like the old married brute that he was:

"Bother your dreams; you will go to sleep on your back; how can you expect anything else to happen than horrible dreams?"

"But this was an extra horrible dream."

"I know, curried prawn last night."

"I want you to listen to it, it may serve as a warning to you," urged this devoted wife.

"No, thank you, Letitia, best keep it for the ayah, she likes to breakfast on horrors."

Mrs. Mortimer, or, as her intimates called her, "Martyr Letitia," closed her lovely and expressive eyes with a deep sigh of resignation, while the callous animal who claimed her as his property got up and began to dress, thinking while he did so, if the pipe he had been smoking the last thing at night had so far escaped her notice, where he had hidden it before going to bed, or if she had managed to find it out and clean it as usual, during the night.

The Major and his wife were only visitors in Delhi on their way up to their station at Loodiana. He was a commonplace little man of about forty-three, who rested satisfied with doing his work, when he had any to do, with a choleric temper that used to express its pent-up heat in very naughty language and violent explosions when stirred up; he was also an inveterate smoker, and always kept beside him a stock of well-seasoned pipes.

His lady was patrician and refined in her habits, with a decided leaning towards religion and melancholy, a great dreamer of portentous dreams, and with her thoughts for ever centred on the past, on the early days of her childhood, before she was chained to this coarse, hardened and unsympathetic scoffer, who took no interest in any of her lofty aims or recollections, but devoted all his spare time and affection to his beastly pipes.

The Major, to ordinary observers, treated this melan-

cholic spouse very much as other married men treat the wives of their choice. He supplied her with what comforts he could afford, gave her as many of the books she liked to read as she could get through, did not enjoy himself at all out of her company, and although he fumed, swore and quarrelled with her half a dozen times per day, allowed her to do pretty much as she liked with him and herself, and backed her up as being the best-looking and most intellectual of her sex; in fact, with all her plaintive nagging, lofty scorn at his plebeian manners, or futile attempts at converting him, they were about as fond and quarrelsome a couple as could be found anywhere.

Although energetic in his work, outside of that he was the most uninteresting of army men; this imaginative wife of his had, however, invested him with some truly satanic attributes. In her heart, she believed that he had sold himself to the arch-enemy of man, possessed the gift of the evil eye, and was, in consequence, doomed eternally, unless through some extraordinary effort and sacrifice on her part she could avert from him this awful fate; therefore she was always exercising her mind and planning out some sacrifice, much to this commonplace little major's discomfort. He did not at all object to her wasting her time, of which she had a superabundance, with helping the chaplain and Mrs. Finch to teach the Eurasian children, or her indefatigable atttempts to convert the Hindoos and Mahomedans from their polygamous ways; indeed, he rather encouraged these modes of expending her superfluous energy, but he used very bad language indeed when she tackled him for his imaginary atrocities, with that saint-like and

forgiving sweetness of hers: it generally makes commonplace sinners, who are cursed with short tempers, blaspheme, when they are pardoned and prayed over for what they did not commit.

Those sad if tender reminiscences of the vanished past also used to be a very grievous burden for this commonplace and ribald little master to bear, and over which he generally lost his presence of mind; to see her so oblivious to the present, which seemed quite good enough for him, and glorifying the days when she was a little girl with her milk and marmalade instead of tea and matrimony, or to hear her thinking aloud how much happier her life might have been if spent in England instead of India, or with some other good man instead of the one she had, generally sent him off to his club or pipe in a most savage and morose state of mind, which did not tend to make him the most sociable of companions.

Of course the real reason of all this was that she had not enough to occupy her active mind, not as yet enough outside excitement or real suffering to bring out the true woman which was lying dormant in her. There were hundreds like her in this sunny climate of ease and idleness whom a little privation or danger would cure of all these surface whims and follies and change into heroines—hundreds of noble hearts in this city of Delhi, pining through lack of purpose, and wasting themselves with vapourings of religious mania or silly flirtations, and only waiting for the stern cure which had been galloping savagely all through the night from the devastated station of Meerut, and was even at that moment so near at hand.

But the hardest of the irritable little Major's crosses

were his pipes; he took vast pride in the colouring of them, and for this purpose, as well as for the enjoyment of his next smoke, liked to keep the remains of his last smoke in the pipe until it was next required, and on this particular point Mrs. Letitia was most persistent in thwarting him; it was a mania with her, which no amount of battles royal or hard swearing could irradicate, to follow after him for the purpose of emptying and cleaning out those pipes. She held a firm belief that the nicotine must hurt his health, and therefore that it was her wifely duty he should find nothing but clean and dry pipes to use, and having a high-bred and keen nose, the good lady discovered his most secret hiding-places, and had done so for years, no matter how artfully he planned the lair.

The instant the pipe left his hand it was pounced upon and cleared out, and the contents consumed; she did not like the task, for her delicate fingers required a great deal of washing and perfuming afterwards, but she never hesitated at the call of duty, either day or night; while he slept she rose gently and hunted about until the hateful objects were found and made right.

Also, notwithstanding her long practice, she made a very aggravating pipe-raker, for her implements were either a hair-pin, the point of her scissors, or a burnt match, so that when the Major came to use the pipes he generally discovered them not only empty as far as enjoyment was concerned, but plugged up as firmly as a spiked gun; therefore I leave old smokers of pipes to imagine the kind of soliloquy he held, as he went hunting about in the hot sun for a stiff enough

straw to clear the way; at such frequent moments in his existence he did behave as if he had sold himself, not to one, but to a whole legion of devils.

He, being of rather a stout build, with a thick and short neck, had been growing apoplectic with these repeated gusts of passion, and was gradually losing all his former taste for the strategy of warfare in the constant engrossment of planning out ambushes for the secure planting of his pipes: he would hide them behind books, inside the lining of the chairs, try to disguise them within innocent-looking parcels, imitate some of the tactics of the criminals of French and American detective stories, but all in vain; though his wife never descended to read sensational fiction, she was clever enough to discover and counteract his most subtle ruse, and reduce him almost to despair.

Yet, being an energetic if exceedingly commonplace individual, and of that composition which makes the British soldier so invincible, he would not own his defeat, but appreciating, and even admiring, while cursing the enemy, he persevered, and occupied his mind constantly after each defeat in planning new ambushes. Mrs. Mortimer did not know it, but for all that she was training her husband to become a very astute general, unless one of those fits of passion carried him off before his education was complete.

"If I could only find for once my pipe as I left it," the poor Major wailed as he made his way to the verandah on this morning, and plunged his hand amongst the vines in the lair in which he had placed his pipe the night before.

"As usual," he muttered wrathfully, as he discovered the nest empty, then he trotted indoors to his pipe-

rack, and took down the pipe which had been so carefully replaced: "As usual, empty and stopped up. I thought I missed her during the night."

This was the substance of his ruminations, only greatly curtailed from the original as to interjections while he went over the yard, purple-visaged as he stooped and picked up odd straws; after which he returned to the verandah, where his early cup of tea and biscuit were placed, and then clearing out the impediment and addressing his mild-eyed servant in very forcible but exceedingly bad language, he disgustedly re-filled the bowl with fresh tobacco, and sat down to meditate upon a new plan for the outwitting of this domestic detective.

The house which he occupied at present had been placed at his service by one of the civil magistrates then on a provincial circuit tour, and was of a sumptuous character, not far from the palace walls, and surrounded by large gardens very tastefully laid out.

The building was solid and ancient, with massive walls, and raised on lofty terraces also like battlements, these lifted tier above tier from the level grounds, which were surrounded on three sides with thick walls, while the bottom of the garden overlooked the river, below them ten or twelve feet. Under the bottom terrace ran a covered passage, with a long colonnade of arches and sculptured pillars, which terminated in a series of steps down to a postern or water-gate and boat-house, within which a comfortable flat-bottomed boat was kept ready for launching.

The main entrance to this mansion was from the street, close to the Cashmere Gates, which a very purely ornamented doorway and gates of bronze

adorned, overlooked and protected by a couple of brass cannon.

On each of the terraces likewise were placed guns on carriages at regular intervals, so that with sufficient force the place might stand a siege if needed.

But at the present moment, with the exception of the host of native servants, the Major and his wife were the only European representatives.

From where he now sat the Major had a clear view of the distant river bank with the pontoon bridge, and beyond that again, the far-reaching plain, with the barracks and bungalows of the officers which lined this part of the highway to Meerut, while by turning his head he could see portions of the city like a panorama spread before him, for the balcony stood high above the outer walls. Palaces of native and English grandees, with their gardens, flat roofs and ornamentation, shops occupied by the merchants and artificers, the Bank, offices of the *Delhi Press*, with the mosques, temples, and churches, while the Arsenal, the greatest in India, with its vast stores of firearms, heavy guns and powder, occupied, with its walls and park, a large space in the centre of the city.

"What a devil of a place to build an arsenal like this," thought the Major, diverted for a moment from his dark pipe designs as he glanced cityward. "I'd rather be where I am than there with Willoughby and Forrest if a rising took place in the city."

Indeed, his present position, commanding as it did the river as well as the street, was perhaps one of the best, if not the very best place he could have been in throughout Delhi. Fortunately also for him, the bulk of his servants were mountaineers and Bhuddists,

the former good fighters and not too prejudiced as regards creed, the latter men of peace, but both alike faithful to the master whose salt they had eaten, as well as being strangers and without sympathy with the population: the magistrate in fixing his house and engaging his servitors had looked ahead to probable emergencies, for within doors he had a well-plenished arsenal of his own placed handy.

It was now a little after seven o'clock, and the major had filled his pipe for the second time, therefore was beginning to enjoy the flavour of it, which restored to him his serenity; he always burnt his first fill for the sake of the pipe and the second for his own pleasure, so that this was all the good lady, at present taking her hair out of the paper wrappings, gained by her strenuous attempts to keep her wilful lord in health.

The major looked down to the parapet of the side wall next the palace, and then at the pearly-tinted sky as if for inspiration, while he smoked gravely and wondered what new dodge he could try to evade the supernatural astuteness of this tender-hearted but tormenting searcher, and then, like all great ideas, an accident brought it to him, and from that moment he was free to return once more to his greater projects all the better warrior for this long exercise of his strategic faculties in trivial matters, for it is the worrying out to success of the trifling details of life which imparts the necessary finish to the mind of a great man.

A ray of the morning sun had struck at an angle one of the brass guns below him and shot a blinding

glare of light, like the dash of a burning glass, into his right eye.

Putting his hand suddenly over the optic struck, he looked down to see the cause, and encountered the gun, and through it his astonishingly simple idea.

"Eureka!—the guns, but why didn't I think of that before?"

Ah, yes, why cannot we think, until the right moment, about the very simple thing which is to make us? It is always something like the way to make an egg stand on its end which we really want, while we are raking heaven, earth and the other place for a plot most intricate.

"Here have I been poking about in all sorts of unlikely places to hide my pipe from her lynx eyes with the proper cage always before me, the gun of course, for where is the woman who will dare to put her arm down the muzzle of a gun, no matter how much she may want to know what is inside? Pándi, my boy, come here."

He clapped his hands together in the exuberance of his sudden joy, when the much-abused attendant dutifully appeared.

"Boy, I swore at you just now?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Worse than usual, I fancy?"

"No, sahib, not worse; just about the usual, I think."

"There is a rupee for you, which is not the usual."

"No, sahib, it is very much not usual, but thank you all the same."

"Now go inside and order the major-domo to

hurry on the breakfast, for the guests will be here presently, yonder they come across the bridge."

"Yes, sahib." The man moved away a few steps and then paused, and turning to his master made a deep obeisance.

"Well, Pándi, what is it?"

"Only this, sahib, that if you feel disposed you can kick me into the bargain for that rupee."

"Go along, I don't want to kick you," answered the major good-humouredly.

"Well, sahib, another time you may while you are filling your pipe, and I'll count it along with this one, for I don't think this morning's swear was quite worth a whole rupee." This servant being a Bhuddist was therefore extra conscientious.

Across the pontoon bridge the party he was expecting to breakfast with him were sweeping on horseback. Mrs. Finch, with half-a-dozen other ladies, attended by her faithful cavaliers Waters, Green and five civilians, they had been out for their early exercise, and were coming to invade the major and his lady in force.

The major also saw at about five miles distant on the plain a great cloud of dust, as if a regiment of cavalry were charging full speed, and taking his field-glass up, he watched them curiously. Yes, it was a regiment or more of native cavalry coming on in a very irregular and undisciplined manner, and with them a whole host of mounted natives, waving and brandishing their arms in a most excited fashion, while about half-a-mile in front of the dense mass raced a solitary rider, as if for his life, with his turbaned head pressing forward on his horse's neck.

CHAPTER V.

THE REVOLT AT DELHI.

IT was a curious and, to this experienced officer, a somewhat ominous sight, the disorderly mob swooping down on the royal city, therefore he kept the glass to his eye watching the crowd unfold its details from the dust-storm it was bringing along with it, while his visitors dashed through the open gate and hailed him from the courtyard below as they dismounted and resigned their steeds to the grooms.

"Good morning, major; what is it that is engrossing your attention just now?"

"Morning, Mrs. Finch; I am watching a flock of vultures after one of their own kind, and it seems strange to me."

"Not at all, major, when there are no pigeons about, the poor things must keep themselves in practice," answered Mrs. Finch merrily, as she, the privileged friend, entered the house to greet her hostess in her bedroom.

"Look here, Waters, what do you make out of that?" and Major Mortimer resigned his glass to the younger officer, who took a steady stare through it.

"Can't make out exactly, it looks like a deserter being chased, possibly that is what it may be, these Orientals are so cussedly excitable over trifles."

"Have you been reading the papers lately, Waters?" growled the major roughly, as he once more took up the glass.

"Yes, of course I have, Mortimer."

Then, sir, you take matters damnably easy, that's all I can say; yonder mob will wake us all up presently, I'm thinking, if my experience of Indian warfare goes for anything."

"What do you think it is, old boy?"

"A rising of sepoys and natives, sir, and the first tidings of a tragedy in the direction of Meerut. Hey, Pandi."

"Yes, sahib," answered Pandi, the Bhuddist, appearing at the door of the breakfast-room with a towel over his arm.

"See that the breakfast is pushed on at once. Ladies, go indoors, and, Waters, come here."

"You are alarming yourself without any reason; we are not on your old battle-ground, the frontier, but in peaceful Delhi," remarked Major Waters, allowing himself to be drawn aside by the energetic Mortimer.

"Perhaps, and perhaps not, meanwhile best be on the safe side. I say, Green, just get on that horse of yours and run over to Commissioner Fraser to warn him of the approaching rebels, so that he may shut the gates; you, Waters, go indoors with the ladies, and take my place at the table; I am going to see to my own doors."

There was no need of a glass now to distinguish the swiftly-rushing host, for the highway was filled with them; like a torrent they spread themselves over the fields and roadway, while that figure on the small, but active grey horse, was urging it to its full speed, and the hoarse roaring of many voices fell on the ears, mingled with the cracking reports of musketry.

Past the bungalows the foremost figure darted, shouting his cry of warning to those inside, while,

before it could be comprehended by those startled inmates, the hell-hounds were also upon them, shooting and cutting them down.

Commissioner Fraser had seen the coming host, and with the fatal confidence of his race was driving out in his gig to meet them, when this figure passed him, yelling:

"Go back for your life, sir, and shut the gates, or you will be murdered like the people of Meerut."

Too late that warning fell on the ears of Commissioner Simon Fraser. In another moment the human wolves were upon him, dragging him from his seat and hacking him to pieces; so quickly was the fell work done that it hardly stopped their headlong speed towards the city, the foremost shooting and slashing at random, while those coming after swarmed into the houses, wrecked and fired them, then hurried after the others.

Across the bridge of boats the solitary leader clattered, yelling himself hoarse without avail, through the city gates, telling the sentinels to shut them, while he vainly sought to stop his maddened horse and help them; the horse was his master now and was carrying him its own way, dashing the crowds aside as it tore up the street and through the bronze doorways of the absent magistrate's mansion which were just being closed, and which with a frantic bound it cleared, the blood and froth flying from its jaws; then on toward the courtyard and stables, which having reached, it dropped headlong on the pavement, sending its light rider full-butt against the crowd of startled grooms, who were scattered right and left, but with their bodies saved the boy Sammy from a broken neck.

Outside in the streets the war of extermination had commenced, a horrid din of savage cries and dying shrieks, which brought the breakfasting-party all to the front, while Sammy Tompkins staggered to his feet and approached Major Waters, whom he saluted.

"Please, Major, I am Sammy Tompkins, whom you sent to Meerut on parole; I'm sorry to have broken it, sir, but I couldn't help coming back to tell you that the sepoys have rose and murdered all the British up there, barring General Hewitt and his white sodgers, so I thought it my dooty to come on at once and report the circumstances."

"That dead horse, where did you pick it up?" asked the major quickly.

"At Meerut; one of the 3rd Natives gave it to me, sir; I think it belongs to these stables, 'cos it ran straight home."

"Yes, it was the magistrate's own favourite; is he killed also?"

"I guess he must be, sir, 'cos there isn't a man-jack left alive in Meerut."

In a few hurried words Sammy made them acquainted with the atrocities he had witnessed the night before and his daring ride with the mutineers, also the gross lack of interest displayed by the Meerut commander, and while he did so little Major Mortimer issued his orders for the defence of the place in a loud, decisive tone; he had something more important than the hiding of a pipe to consider now, and this able soldier, who had seen active service, rose to the occasion.

The women were hastily packed indoors to look out bandages, etc., in case they might be wanted. To

Mrs. Finch's credit, it must be said that her first thoughts were about her husband and children, but on Sammy, in his disguise as a native, and the Afghan butler offering their services to go to her house, she consented to wait inside like the sensible woman she was, therefore the pair slipped out by the little postern at the side of the servants' entrance, which led into a quiet lane.

It was well that Sammy and the butler left at once, because on reaching this postern they found it wide open, left doubtless so by the Mussulman servants, who at the first alarm had stolen quietly away to join the insurgents. There remained only friends and allies now within the grounds, therefore it was much better to be rid of the traitors. The butler locked the door after him, and then the pair went on their dangerous mission.

Major Mortimer showed his generalship by the arrangement of his small forces; he had seven able Europeans besides himslf, and ten coloured men whom he could depend upon and trust with weapons, these were the grooms and the outside servitors, Santals and Afghans, who like the Ghourkas had been accustomed from their infancy to warfare, and enjoyed it; these with the English he placed on the upper portion of the house where they could overlook the grounds, with a plentiful stock of arms and ammunition. Of the Bhuddist indoor-servants, he left some with the ladies, and the rest he kept beside him to act as messengers while he took up his position on the roof of the top tower, where he had a clear view of the city and approaches to the outer gate.

Mrs. Finch's house stood but a short distance away,

so that before the arrangements were perfected for defence, the two messengers were back with the children, governess, and ayah, decked up in Mahomedan veils. They had managed to effect the rescue while the sepoys were disputing under the windows of the King's Palace, and the crowd outside were still pausing irresolute, but Mr. Finch had gone to his place of business. They brought back word that the King was temporizing, as were also the 74th Native Infantry, who at the present were waiting outside the gates, but that the 38th and 54th had joined the mutineers after wounding Colonel Ripley and killing some of their officers. They were still hoping, however, that the main body from Meerut under General Hewitt would be in presently.

"That hope is a vain one, with General Hewitt at the head of affairs," said Major Mortimer gloomily, when he heard this report. "We must look after ourselves now, for he will never trouble himself about us. I know him of old."

The sun was already blazing down fiercely upon the roof-top where the Major stood, so that only an old stager like himself could have endured it; but with his faithful pipe in his mouth, which he sucked furiously at, he moved about actively and kept a careful watch over every vantage point. Major Waters still regarded it as only a temporary outbreak, which would be easily put under, but the elder man knew better.

The streets were packed with the same crowd who had been so good-tempered on the day after the palace fête, but they were in a different mood now, shouting wildly and mocking at the white faces which peered at them from their closed windows. Most of

this rabble brandished knives and matchlocks, while many were carrying loads of firewood and combustibles towards the English quarters. They were only held in check for the present by the dread lest General Hewitt might appear with his Meerut force, but that fear would be soon swallowed by the fury and thirst for carnage which possessed them. The Major looked over the dark sea of threatening and excited faces, and then at the empty road over which the sun shone so brightly, and his heart sank. No aid was coming from Meerut.

The rarefied air made the voices of the disputants clearly heard from the palace grounds; the troopers of the 3rd Cavalry were there, demanding an entrance, to the King, and defying the attempts at conciliation on the part of Captain Douglas of the guards. All at once an unusual yelling and firing of muskets took place, and then hell's work began in deadly earnest.

A sudden vertigo seemed to fall upon the brains of that heaving multitude, so that they swayed to and fro and staggered about as if struck blind. It was the spirit of carnage passing over them, like an electric wave, from the palace walls, where the sepoys were slaughtering the Europeans and placing the old King in a position beyond retreat. There were no leaders as yet to direct them, only that blood passion to link them together in one grand odic sympathy, the sympathy and infection of crime, with the souls of past murderers taking possession of them and urging them forward, reasonless, yet in strange unity of instinct, to deeds.

They needed no leaders to direct them as yet, with those invisible demons drawing them onwards

through that brain-scorching sunlight, no eyes to see, or ears to hear the shrieks of the dying; while this instinct remained unglutted they had no more leisure to torture than has the famishing lion when he leaps upon his victim, and as little feeling for pain or selfish fear; the blood-fury banished all these other emotions which are peculiarly human, and imparted to them the courage and promptitude of the wild and hungry beast of prey. One universal and hoarse roar burst from these countless and parched throats, the awful roar of a frenzied city suddenly waking up to its own power for destruction; a roar that rent the air-eddies of the sky, shook the trees in the gardens, and made the walls of the houses tremble from their bases upwards to their roofs, and then the mob were off on their fell mission.

Still, the regiment of the 74th Native Infantry resisted that terrible infection which had seized upon their countrymen, and stood at their post under the gates, with sombre faces and eyes fixed on the earth, paying no heed to the officers who were amongst them urging them with frantic orders and even blows to action; immovable they waited while Captain Douglas and those with him were being slashed to pieces by the troopers, and the palace guard and the masses were dragging fair women about the streets by their tresses, catching infants on their spears and bayonets, and sabreing the resisting men.

Major Mortimer was helpless to give any assistance to his murdered countrymen; he could only look on and groan while he waited for his own turn to come, for the attack had been so sudden, the British so few in number and so isolated. As yet his stronghold had

been ignored by the stampeding mob, who had rushed in a body to the Delhi Bank, where the treasure was supposed to be, and to the Arsenal, where the arms were stored. They wanted money and weapons first.

The Major could see from his elevated position the hurried preparations for resistance which were being made about the Arsenal, the closing and barricading of the gates, and the guns being wheeled into position; but he saw also that the workers of these guns were all natives, and that they required a great deal of urging to move at all to the command of the few Englishmen who were posted there.

The sepoys now rushed out from the palace, which they had turned into a barracks, with scaling-ladders on their shoulders and loud shouts to their motionless comrades at the gates to join them, and that broke the long spell. Since the Meerut forces had not made their appearance, there could be no fear of their coming before the city was in possession of the rightful owners. With a responding cheer, the 74th turned their muskets on their officers, and dashed after the troopers to join the besieging mob at the Arsenal. When they saw this, the unwounded officers retreated to their own deserted barracks to look after their wives and children; any hope that they had of quelling the mutiny was at an end.

A short and gallant fight that was at the Arsenal between those plucky English defenders and the dusky enemy; their native men to whom they had given out arms in hopes that they would be faithful, deserted at the first shot, and climbing the walls, dropped amongst the besiegers and joined them in the attack.

Now they were swarming over the walls by thousands, while the three or four brave fellows blattered away with the guns at them, and disputed each inch of the way. The Major's heart thrilled as he watched the desperate struggle, but he could only shout the applause which never reached their ears; no man could hope to get through that intervening mass of unfortunate savages.

The walls were covered with them, so that hardly a stone could be seen between from that distance, and the place seemed in their hands, when all at once there was a retrograde movement, while the Indians tried to run and climb back again; the Major knew the meaning of this change, and his mouth opened, while he held his breath:

"By God! Willoughby is firing the magazine: we shall all be blown to blazes with that store of powder."

Hardly were the words gasped out when the terrific explosion took place, which shook every house in Delhi and caused an earthquake for miles outside the city, hundreds of natives, with huge stones, débris and dense volumes of smoke, shot up into the sky.

The Major fell on his face and lay there half-stunned with the shock, while a darkness like evening shaded the land, then, recovering himself, he rose and looked out again.

The Arsenal was a ruin, while the panic-stricken natives were flying in all directions.

"Poor boys, poor brave boys," sobbed the Major, thinking on the heroes of the magazine.

But all were not yet dead, for while he watched he saw four figures crawl from the ruins and begin

running along the street; he could not see who they were, but something told him they were his countrymen, so impulsively he rushed down from his post with Sammy and a few of the servants and made their way to the front gate.

There they were coming along with a pack of natives after them, Willoughby, Forrest, and two of the sergeants, Raynor and Buckly were their names. The party at the gate fired at some of the natives nearest to the hunted men, and then as they came up, drew the powder-blackened and sorely bruised heroes inside, and once more clashed the gates of bronze together; for the moment they had found a shelter.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE PALACE OF BITHÚR.

WHEN Prince Nana called his palace of Bithúr a little house, he was in the Royal House of the Moguls, and was therefore speaking by comparison and out of modesty.

In reality it was magnificent, in regard to its architecture, site and furnishing, and although this had only been one of the Peshwa's establishments when in full power, it was by no means one of his least.

It lay by the side of the river, into which its glories were reflected, a palace composed of pink and white marble, with long, delicately carved façades and richly sculptured pillars, with a long flight of steps reaching from the river, all ornate with carvings to the first row of balconies; it had many turrets topped with gilt minarets, while silk banners and awnings

of gold and radiant tints added variety and oriental lavish display to the delicacy of the marble.

Delicious gardens surrounded this Arabian Nights' dream of a palace, shady groves, gorgeous flowers, fountains and ponds—all that might constitute the paradise of a refined sybarite.

Yet Nana was no sybarite, but rather a Brahmin of the highest caste; beef and wines were abominations in his eyes, as were the defiled beef-eating and wine-bibbing Faringhees; and although careless in his talk when acting a part with his natural enemies, he was one of the most ascetic of his order as regards self indulgence. He had chosen his zenana from a caste equal to his own, and regarded with a refined horror the contact of anything inferior.

At this point of his black career he was a patriot, pure and simple, as indeed he is still regarded in native eyes. The Faringhee, male and female, were a defiled race, as the Mussulmen were, whom one might sacrifice to the Goddess Kali, who liked blood, but not otherwise touch without risk of contamination.

As a Brahmin high priest he was inclined to meditation, with his rooms and grounds filled with flowers. A refined aristocrat of aristocrats, who had to study every action so that he did not infringe any of the countless laws of purity—the great and mind-educating laws of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the three great powers, whose symbolic cord he wore, the mystic Aum.

"What is this world?" says the Brahmin sage. "As the bough of a tree, on which a bird rests for a night and flies away in the morning."

He rose at dawn each morning for prayers, wor-

shipping the rising sun as the source of life. His body was the temple of this trinity of gods, therefore had to be considered reverently as a thing very sacred in all its parts.

The household gods must be propitiated; five hours each day was regularly devoted to religious exercise, and the rest of the day as a solemn preparation. His food was carefully studied, as all his other acts were, and charity to the poor was a virtue studiously attended to.

The Nana's household was conducted on the most ceremonious and pious principles: rice or curried vegetables were their only indulgences, and these only permitted with the most stately and solemn restrictions, while the shedding of blood was only admitted as a compromise, the sacrificer being a priest of an inferior order.

In virtue of his high order, Nana had many sealed wives appointed to him throughout the land, who lived perpetually with their fathers; his own Zenana, under the control of his adopted mother, was also pretty well filled, but these were regarded as attendants only; his favourite, Zulma, had no cause for jealousy with her ascetic husband, for his mind was engrossed in his ambitious and patriotic dreams, and all his affections were bestowed upon her and their girl-child, Bhéta.

Outside, with the people he so constantly deceived, Nana Sahib was a jovial, indulgent, and almost English host. With his intimates he was a morose and disappointed, revengeful, deposed king, yet possessing a rare gift of personal fascination, which endeared him to them, and made them sacrifice their

hearts' blood for him cheerfully, when the time came. To his adopted mother he was the most dutiful of sons, as he was the most tender of husbands and fathers to his beautiful young wife and daughter.

On the morning after his return home from Delhi he was sitting playing with his daughter, while his wife sat near, talking to him and her royal mother-in-law; outside, the palace was crowded with his friends and retainers, who amused themselves as best they could while waiting for the appearance of their master.

His establishment resembled that of an old Highland chieftain: each of his henchmen was devoted to his service, and regarded him as the controller of their destinies; recompense was not considered in their fidelity, although, as far as his means would allow, he treated them with a regal lavishness; but they were quite as ready to go forth and levy contributions from the chance-passenger or serf as ever Highland clansmen could have been in the good old times, when Scotland was divided into separate families.

A pretty picture that Zenana made of domestic felicity and refined luxury. The Nana rolling about with his spoilt little daughter, the fond young mother watching the game with happy eyes, and that stern dame, the widow of the Maráthá Peshwá, looking indulgent, yet keeping a watchful eye upon the behaviour of the handmaids as they occupied themselves in various ways.

It seems almost as strange for English readers to imagine Nana Sahib as the flower-loving, vegetarian Brahmin, or tender, sportive father, as it must seem

to the mouse who, from its hole, watches the mother-cat playing with her kitten ; it must also be repulsive to the same readers' sensibilities, to regard this inhuman monster as a patriot. And yet, for all that, he represented his own race as their Wallace, Alfred, or Tell; and is still regarded as "The Deliverer," who will come again. I dare say a great number of women and infants perished also before the hosts of these heroes, when the fever of war was on them, as there were Indian mothers and children butchered by our men in the reprisal, although these casualties are not so particularly noticed when they happen to our enemies as they are when the loss and horror are on our side.

It has been said that the merciful Hindoos were taught how to throw up English infants and catch them on their bayonets by some of the Faringhee soldiers, who, in a drunken frolic, did this in the first instance with the brown babies, as the low-caste sepoys were instructed by their white instructors in the drinking of rum and gin. If this report is true, then we must be just, for the sake of Truth, even in our condemnation and abhorrence of their after atrocities.

The apartment in which this chastely happy family sat was like the other chambers of the palace, as well as the grounds, covered with flowers on every available space, which are regarded as the most pleasing sacrifice to the Trinity ; a rich and heavy perfume of roses, honeysuckle and lilies filled the air, through which fluttered hundreds of gaily-tinted butterflies, dragon-flies, humming-birds and honey-bees, with the other species of Indian-winged flower-lovers.

Festoons of flowers clung to the marble sides, and drooped over the open windows and doorways on this ardent May day, hangings and soft cushions of the costliest wrought silk and gold fell in graceful folds instead of doors, and lay scattered about in artistic disorder upon the almost priceless rugs which covered the marble pavements. A fountain of perfumed water spouted its cooling spray from the centre, while a clear spring rippled down a tiny grotto, at one corner, beside which were placed the vessels needful for the constant ablutions required by the devout, for prayers and bathing filled out a considerable portion of the Hindoo day.

On this forenoon, after his return home, Nana was inclined to take life easy, for the appointed hour for the rising was a good way off, and he carried with him a special dispensation, by reason of his coming work, by which he, the contemplative Brahmin, might become a soldier and be permitted many other objectionable indulgences and laxities without eventually losing caste; for the sake of his Cause he had deliberately prepared to defile himself, for which he should have to make heavy penance and sacrifices afterwards, before he could be purified and restored to his temporarily suspended grade.

Little Bhétá took after her high-bred mother, rather than her father, whom the small-pox had marred considerably in appearance, and was of the age three years, when a child is most engaging, with her lisping utterances and quaint attempts at lengthy words; a slight-made fairy, with silky, blue-black hair, oval face, small, delicate features and great, deep, limpid eyes; she was costumed as if to vie with the

fluttering butterflies around her, and was about as active and fairy-like in her motions.

Being the only child in that Zenana, she was very much petted and spoilt by the crowd of nurses which she was blessed with—those little mothers who were so busy making banners for the armies of their revered lord, and decorating them with the insignia of the Monkey God of the Maráthás, Hanuman.

Bhéta ran about here, there, and everywhere, now disturbing the cooing doves from their perches on the window-sills, now making havoc with the gold and silk threads which the ladies were using in the flags, or plucking the flowers to make a garland for her father's brow, while he watched her graceful motions with fond, softened looks, as he smoked his hookah or told of his adventures at Delhi, with grotesque imitations of the Faringhees' arrogance, that made his listeners burst into loud ripples of mocking laughter. The prince was a good story-teller, and his admiring audience were easily pleased, as the satelites of princes generally are when they condescend to tell a story or make a joke.

Dressed in spotless and fine white linen, with a gold cloth turban on his head, Nana was simply and suitably robed for the Zenana; and presently, when his little Bhéta ran to his side with her garland, and daringly unrolled his turban, he smiled on her effrontery indulgently.

"Bhéta going to make papa into a Peshwa."

"He is that already, baba, as thou knowest," said her mother reprovingly.

"Not yet, Buchna," corrected Nana softly.

"There, papa, you are one now, the great flower Peshwa. Doesn't he look nice, mamma?"

Just as Bhéta had crowned her father with her garland and stood back to admire the effect, the hangings were moved aside and a female slave appeared with a deep salaam.

"A messenger from Delhi has just arrived to see my lord on important business."

"Who is it? remarked Nana listlessly.

"The Maulavi of Faizabad, who craves ten thousand pardons for breaking upon my lord's repose, but says that his message must be delivered without delay as it is on a matter of life and death, and he has far to ride before sunset."

"Then I must see this troublesome Maulavi, I suppose, who will not let men rest. Help me to dress, Zulma."

"Yes, Aga Jau," answered his loving spouse, rising from her seat and taking the gorgeous state robe from its stand, while the other ladies put down their needles and moved up to assist.

The process of attiring this master was a detailed affair, and occupied each of the ladies for fully half-an-hour, washing, drying, perfuming, hair-dressing, and moustache curling; while the others attended to the separate details of the toilet, the favoured Zulma held the sacred robe, while her mother-in-law waited with his jewelled arms, sash, and turban. As the ladies adorned him he made them laugh with a comic description of the impatient Maulavi all that time fuming in the darbar.

At last he was ready for the audience chamber, a very bejewelled and magnificent object indeed; then, after turning himself slowly around like a peacock, so that the zenana hens might be gratified with a final look

at his gracious majesty, and receiving their loud notes of admiration complacently, he bent himself before his adopted mother for her blessing, and saluting the lovely Zulma, he bestowed his own blessing upon his other women, which they received with bent knees and downcast eyes, and with a paternal pat on the cheek to Bhéta, he passed from their devout regard like a demigod, while they returned to their gossip and their work.

In the hall outside the zenana limit he was met by his most favoured courtiers, his brother, Azim-Ullah, Jawala Parshad, his nephew Rao Sahib, and the captain of his clan, Tantia Topí, and escorted to the hall of audience, where, with a twinkle in his eyes which embraced the fierce and impatient Maulavi, twitching all over with hardly-suppressed excitement, he passed slowly to his chair of state after bending before it in silent prayer.

The Maulavi watched these solemn and time-taking ceremonies with lurid eyes, muttering in his beard while he cracked his finger-joints: "Allah! but these Hindoos pray for ever; and a battle might be lost or won before they are ready to attend to it."

"Approach, my faithful ally, Ahmed-Ullah, of Faizabad, and tell us your news. They must be important since you could not wait to sup first."

With a stride like a panther's bound the Maulavi cleared the space between him and the prince, and then, with a hasty salaam, he raised his head and spoke rapidly and loudly.

"I have ridden from Delhi in two days and three nights without resting to eat, and I must reach Lucknow by to-morrow morning.

"A long journey, Maulavi," murmured the prince, courteously but carelessly.

"I have ridden this long journey and killed five good horses, my lord of Bithúr and Peshwa of the Maráthás, to tell you that the time has arrived. Delhi is ours and the Feringhee there no more; Meerut is also a ruin, while the vultures there are glutted with Feringhee flesh. Throughout all the stations to the north the sepoys have deserted from and slain their masters. Those stations between this and Delhi which I passed through, when they heard my word, rose to a man. In Cawnpore they are only waiting to get their directions from you."

"Ah! This is news indeed, both good and evil, Maulavi Behader," shouted Nana exultingly, springing from his seat and drawing his sword. "Good, that our enemies rot in the sun; bad, that our people did not wait for the hour appointed, for we are not ready yet."

"Then you must make yourselves ready," answered the Maulavi hoarsely, "for to wait now means defeat."

"What say you, Tantia Topí, can you force on your preparations?"

"Yes, sire, before sunset we shall be ready for Cawnpore."

"Good," grunted the Maulavi. "You are a man of action, Tantia Topí. I am going now through Cawnpore and will pass your message to the sepoys there to meet at Bithúr to-night under the banner of the Peshwa."

"The Peshwa!" shouted the courtiers, flashing their swords round their heads, while Nana looked at them silently, leaning on his weapon.

"The Peshwa Dandhu Panth, the Peshwa Nana, Lord of the Universe."

Then they knelt before him, with the exception of Ahmed-Ullah, who still stood with folded arms watching the king fiercely.

There was a pause, while Nana stood above them silently, with a thoughtful frown upon his brow, for he was at the Rubicon beyond which there could be no retreat.

Then, with a shake of his jewelled turban, he made a sudden step forward, raising his head proudly to reply, when all of a sudden the words died in his throat and his dusky cheeks blanched, for there, beside the erect Maulavi, stood the astral double of the mystic Bhuddist sage, Jasim Sakya-Muni.

The figure stood as palpable-looking as were the others, clad in his monkish habit, fixing his calm, steadfast and inscrutable eyes upon the Brahmin Prince sorrowfully.

"The Baigargia again!" gasped out Nana, as he sank in his chair and covered his eyes with his jewelled fingers, while the kneeling princes sprang to their feet and shrank aside with fear, leaving that strange intruder by himself.

"Yes, Nana Dandhu Panth, I have come again for the second time to warn you before it is too late, before you stain your soul with the blood of innocence and sink it to the level of those who must begin as swine on this earth. I have come again, because hitherto you have lived wisely and well, to save you from perdition."

"I have a dispensation, Sakya-Muni, by which all that I do may be cleansed away."

"The deeds you will be driven into cannot be cleansed under ten thousand cycles of years, besides

you will have no leisure left to make the sacrifices which this lying dispensation demands ; you must decide now to lose all that you have gained since your first birth, or sacrifice your ambition now."

Nana sat for a time as if crushed, while the mystic watched him sadly yet with yearning affection. Then he lifted his head and said defiantly :

" I have decided to be Peshwa, or nothing, and fight for my rights, so trouble my life no longer Jasim Baigargia ; go back to your own place, wise man, and leave me to mine, for my destiny is already written out."

" Farewell, my son," breathed that low, clear, yet far-away voice, " I shall come once again to you, when the battles are lost, and your doomed spirit waits for its release, groaning under the heavy weight of its iniquities without a hope of purification, in the hour when you lie deserted and alone, with no one else to give you the cleansing gift of fire, then you will see me for the third and last time. Fare ye well."

As it uttered this dreary and ominous leave-taking the figure slowly melted from their midst, while once again the golden sunshine filtered in upon them through the blinds and flower festoons.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE JUNGLE.

MIDNIGHT in the jungle, and twenty days after the loss of Delhi.

A band of English refugees are camping here in the midst of a country swarming with wild beasts, the natural home of the ferocious Bengal tiger and hardly less to be dreaded wild elephants.

These refugees are the remnant left from Delhi, a crowd of women and children, amongst which are to be found Mrs. Major Mortimer with her friend Mrs., or as we must now term her, Widow Finch, with her two children, while amongst the humbler lot are to be found Mrs. Tompkins and her friend Molly Brannagan, heroines all of them, who have done their share of heavy marching, awful fatigue, unparalleled dangers, and heroic actions only to be recorded by a modern Homer. Henceforth, to those who escape with their lives, the humblest there, and also the most shady, will be regarded as sisters from the same milk, Ham-shir, with the most patrician or most holy.

They are dirty, tattered and unwashed, so that it is difficult to distinguish the patrician from the plebeian, for when cambric gets dust-stained and silks hang in stripes, I don't know but what the preference may be given to unbleached cotton and winsey or serge; combs and brushes also had been forgotten in that desperate hurry, so that the pretty tresses, woman's glory, hang about the hunger-pinched faces, in a matted and picturesque confusion such as we notice about the slums of great cities. Many of these heroines also are bootless and stockingless, with all sorts of savage expedients used to cover their delicate shoulders and little heads—but what of that? they have gone through the valley of the shadow of death hand in hand, with words of angel hope and comfort to the men who are breaking their hearts about them.

This noble endurance has sanctified them so, that from now to the hour of their death, the men must honour them as sisters, and thrill with a holy thrill of confidence and faith at the touch of their little

hands, at the sound of their musical voices; this march has indeed brought them all very close to the infinite harmony of heaven.

The women and the children sleep within sight of the fires, while the men keep guard round them and watch over them with moistened eyes. Reckless profligates some of these watchers have been, desperate drunkards and cheats a few of them may have been regarded in the past, but they are brothers now; the sternest with such a breadth of indulgence for the weaknesses and follies of the others, that they will smile over the slips from rectitude that once made them meditate a court-martial. "Yes, poor fellow," they will admit unwillingly. "He may have his weak moments; but he is a man, sir, who was with us in the passage from Delhi, and——my friend through good or evil report."

Sammy is there, still in his native rags, and he is the best off, for instead of needing a bath to keep up his character, a roll in the mud does the purpose almost as well as the umber no longer to be had; he has been able to serve his party well, owing to his disguise and his command of the native languages, by stealing into villages for provisions, and fossicking out friendly and sympathetic natives, for without such sympathizers not a Faranghee could possibly have escaped from the ruthless trackers.

Hiding under friendly huts by day, or inside deserted temples and caves, avoiding the highways where the hordes of murderers prowled in search of victims, making their way by night and early morning through forests infested with ravenous beasts of prey, crossing rivers and streams with treacherous

currents and quicksands, also crowded with deadly monsters, this devoted band had covered two-thirds of their way towards Cawnpore, where they trusted to find friends; walking, fighting and fasting most of the journey, it was an experience to make them love one another all the days of their natural lives, for not a man, woman or child there showed the white feather.

Colour-Sergeant Tompkins had escaped, also Jackson, Majors Mortimer and Waters, with Lieutenant Green and the heroes of the arsenal.

Major Mortimer with his party had held his position until the midnight of that fatal day, making occasional sorties out and rescuing a few of the many victims, after which they retreated, first to the house of Sir Theophilus Metcalf beyond the city, after giving their aid to the survivors of the main-guard at the gates, then, after that became untenable, to the open country.

They had tried to reach Meerut, but found the way stopped in every direction by the overwhelming bodies of sepoys and savage natives, therefore they fled southward, the weak ones succumbing every day and being buried the best way available, while the survivors went along, facing death through disease, starvation, snake-bites, wild beasts and treacherous foes at every turn of the way.

Sergeant George Jackson had good cause to congratulate himself on his luck during the fighting outside Delhi, for as he wore the rings on his fingers and the black crystal on his left breast like a medal, he found himself strangely protected, indeed as soon as the natives saw these ornaments they gave him and those with him a wide berth; he did doughty deeds

and headed many a desperate sally, but it was like hacking down unresisting thistles, or stabbing at sheaves of corn; he was evidently protected by a mighty influence, and no one dared to stand up before him.

Several times when surrounded had he saved the lives of his party by dashing out of the ambuscade at the enemy; whenever they beheld that sun-reflecting amulet on his left breast they retired *en masse*, and left the fugitives to go on.

Sergeant Jackson was therefore regarded with great favour by the rest of the band, and put into the van whenever a rush had to be made, therefore he was naturally somewhat uplifted by his acquired power. Yet he could not hide from himself that, although the ornaments gave him seeming impunity, they nevertheless attracted great notice as they passed along. For days lately they had been followed by two separate parties whom they could not shake off, yet who never came near enough to attack them.

Whenever they camped those separate bodies of followers appeared to be hovering close at hand, by night or by day; they did not help them when attacked by casual prowlers, neither did they offer to molest them when alone, but they made their presence felt in many curious ways.

Sometimes Sergeant Jackson would discover a store of provisions placed handy at the moment they were hardest up, or a fine fat head of venison just speared; it appeared to him that his benefactress was looking after him and trying to guard him as much as possible from privation, and with his customary carelessness he took these benefits as his just due.

On this night the camp was desperate, for during

the last two days these friendly hoverers had entirely disappeared, so that, while this favoured young man kept his watch as outside picquet, he began to occupy his thoughts by wishing that something would turn up to fill out his waist-belt. The sleepers were all right for a few hours, the watchers were the present sufferers with their empty bellies.

"By the Lord, but I wish I had a chew o' baccy this blooming night," muttered the disconsolate sergeant as he marched to and fro just within range of the fire-light, and lo! as if the god who presided over his amulet had hear his wish, a slight figure in white appeared, which set his heart a fluttering.

"Who goes there?"

"Havildar Jackson," breathed the voice, a female's evidently.

"Yes, that is my name, and what do you want?"

The figure glided closer to him, and then he saw a young girl of about fifteen, and in her hand what he was longing for, a cigar.

"One who loves you sent me here; you have not smoked, Havildar, lately; smoke now, while I tell you her message."

Jackson thought for a brief second about his comrades; no one in the camp had smoked lately and he would have like to have shared his prize, but then who can share one cigar?

"Here, girl, have you no more of these?"

"Plenty more where I got this from, but light up and listen to what I say."

She struck a light with a small flint and steel and the sergeant gave in; the cigar was between his lips, lighted, and for a few moments he was in paradise.

Meanwhile the forest maiden watched him curiously, and he was sucking into that weed with the gusto of a starving man.

"I was to tell you, Havildar—"

"Yes," dreamily murmured the sergeant, still puffing out the smoke, but with his eyes closing and a dreamy delight in his brain which caused his voice to sound at a great distance.

"I was to tell you, Havildar—"

The cigar fell from his lips, while he dropped to the ground, the girl catching his musket as he sank.

She turned and made a signal in the direction of the dark jungle, and immediately about a dozen men appeared with a covered palankeen which they laid at the side of the unconscious sergeant.

"Lift him up gently, bearers, for each hair of his fair head is as pure gold to our Queen—so!" observed the maiden, as the natives laid the sergeant amongst the cushions of the hand-carriage very gingerly, while she followed and sat beside him.

Then at the word from this young girl they all retreated, carrying the palankeen into the shadows.

* * * * * *

The fugitives had by this time grown accustomed to the terrific and strange sounds of the jungle by night, so that they could sleep through the most startling of them, as the keepers of a menagerie are able to sleep close to the cages of their restless charges; we can get used to anything with the help of time. Even a Salvation Army doss-house may come to feel like sweet home to the weary tramp in time, when he has been able to live down the memory of his other haunts and homes.

The covetous roar of a passing hungry lion did not disturb these horror-inured pedestrians, neither did the blood-curdling shriek of the spiteful tiger, for they knew while the fires were kept burning that these enemies dare not venture too close; the fierce trumpetings of the distant elephants, destroying whole villages and making desolation while they rushed along, did not trouble that band greatly, as they knew that there was no more use trying to get out of the road of a band of these savage mammoths than it is to escape the sand-storm when it rises up in its wrath, for no ordinary barricade can stop the progress of elephants when on the rampage; so that, while trusting in the Providence which had protected them so far, they had to take the risk of being found out and crushed to pulp, as they had to accept the risks of being bitten by the many varieties of venomous reptiles to be encountered while they pushed along—the deadly little emerald-tinted vipers, that hid in the branches, and made for their eyes as they parted the tendrils, or the cobra that crouched amongst the dry rough patches of grass.

They had witnessed horrors during those twenty days which made them careless of these minor dangers, while Death was too attentive a companion for them to shed more than a passing tear over a comrade or a dear one snatched from their side by this ruthless escort.

One of the women there, who had escaped from the palace massacre by declaring herself ready to join the faith of Islám, had shared in the five days' imprisonment of the underground dungeons, where naked they had lain without light, waiting on the

fate which came so surely at last; she was only a common woman, and almost ignorant of any other religion when she went into the palace, so for the sake of her children she had thought little about abjuring the faith she knew so little about, and had been a brown-haired young woman on the 11th, but left the city on the 14th snowy-haired and broken down, after witnessing her noble companions dragged up to the courtyard and given over to the rebels, then massacred *en masse*, and thrown afterwards naked, shamed, and mutilated, into the Jumna, like offal from the butchers' carts.

She had lost everything except her children, but she had saved them, and was therefore content with the sacrifices she had made, while no one reproached her in that ragged band.

Mrs. Finch had taken the tidings of her husband's death quietly, and listened to the account of the looting of the Delhi Bank where all her savings were deposited with dry-eyed despair, for these left her penniless and without a position; but she was young still, and not quite friendless, so, like a bankrupt who has passed through the court, with some of his stock still at his command, she felt free to begin on the same old lines.

Mrs. Major Mortimer had no longer any occasion to trouble herself about those obnoxious pipes, for the major had long ago sucked his last one dry and clean, and had to content himself with the smell now and then of the seasoned wood; no domestic bickerings disturbed the ears of the friends of this affectionate couple, for all were grateful to have her prayers, so that she had become their spiritual director and found

her days filled with congenial work, ministering to the sick and dying, and reciting the burial service over the dead, therefore she had become happy, cheerful and hopeful; her dreams were visions of consolation which brought comfort to the others, her husband was no longer a lost soul in her eyes, but a noble protector and hero. Letitia had risen to the occasion and cast aside the robes of Cassandra, which did not suit her nearly so well as the scanty and tattered skirts of the inspired prophetess, who so confidently promised a successful termination to their present trials and tribulations.

During the interval between the changing of the pickets, a lank and hungry grey wolf slouched past the spot where the abducted Sergeant Jackson had stood, and where his loaded musket still lay; the evil beast smelt dubiously for a few moments at this relic of the sergeant's and then crept closer to the sleepers by the fire, keeping to the shadow side of them as much as possible.

The white-haired renegade slept on the outer rim with her youngest child in her arms. That daring wolf drew nearer to her by slow degrees until he also nestled beside her, covered by her shadow, then he began to lick the protecting arm which held the little one softly and gently.

The warm breath and the moist tongue were gradually influencing that naked arm, so that it was slipping from the child and relaxing its hold, while a pleased smile parted the lips of the sleeper; probably that warm contact and soft breathing at her side made her dream of the husband whom she had seen murdered so shortly before.

Another moment, and the dainty morsel now resting so placidly on that worn-out bosom would be the wolf's own, and his phosphoric eyes began to glare with most unholy desire, while he was reaching up his head and red jaws to the little victim, when the discordant and savage chorus of a passing pack of mad jackals disturbed the mother and defeated his patient object.

The mother half woke and turned quickly away from this treacherous enemy of babyhood, renewing her former instinctive clutch at her treasure, while the disappointed wolf drew back and rushed for the friendly cover with a snarl of rage, which doubtless represented a very profound curse in wolf language, at those noisy marplots the jackals.

Sammy, on guard a short distance away, got a glimpse of the grey shadow as it bounded past a streak of firelight and discharged his musket in the direction of its flight; that signal with the yell from the wounded marauder woke up the camp, although the other jungle sounds had failed to do so, and in another instant every man was at his post, alert and watchful.

Sammy, of course, had not meant to disturb these worn-out heroes who so wofully required their sleep when, with a boy's thoughtlessness, he wasted that shot, nor could he have guessed the intention of the Providence that prompted him to do so, yet, although inclined to sneak away to a shady corner and reload his musket quietly and then deny his share of the false alarm, during the first instant of alarm, in another moment he was priding himself on his soldier-like perspicacity in doing so when he saw,

where the wolf had vanished, a band of mounted insurgents charging upon them from the darkness.

When this surprise-party perceived that they were discovered they halted suddenly, as natives ever do before the English line, then with a chorus of yells they came on again, to be met by a withering volley which emptied a third of their saddles and broke up their charging order into hopeless confusion.

This was but an ordinary incident in this eventful journey with these starving and wearied protectors of the women, and was soon over, the natives broke loose and slashed wildly, with awful war-cries, cutting down a few more of that diminishing band, while the British met them with English cheers and fixed bayonets, and no native born of woman can stand that. Back into the night the dark-skinned survivors fled, while the victors picked up their wounded and slain and returned once more to their melancholy camp, where the women tore away some more of their scanty clothing to bind up the bleeding gashes of their heroes and Mrs. Mortimer got out her prayer-book to officiate over the noble dead.

A hasty service and shallow burial under that hard clay soil and then the camp was broken up, and once more through the jungle the heroes and heroines dragged their wearied limbs, mile after mile of darkness, till the morning star burnt dim and the swift dawn shot up to usher in another day of thirst and fierce torment.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAWNPORE.

ROUND about and in Cawnpore the hosts of Nana are swarming in their thousands, while the little force under General Wheeler remain cooped up under the eyes of the ruthless enemy in one of the worst possible positions for defence; two barracks in the midst of the plain, with only an entrenchment between them and the beleaguers, who occupied the heights, commanded the river passage, and barred all other exits most effectually.

The Maratha Prince had crossed the Rubicon, and, after a few wily pretences of friendship so as to get the treasury and arsenal into his own hands, he had cast aside all further disguises, hoisted his standards, and had himself formally crowned as Peshwa, then giving the order to his men to loot and fire the city after removing all the guns, ammunition and money to his own camp, and intimating his intention to attack the garrison, by letter, to the commander, he began, without the loss of an hour, to fix his artillery and open fire.

An awful day and night of horror succeeded his order of extermination, after the priceless and unlimited wealth of heavy guns had been removed from the magazine; the burning of bungalows and excited yells of the insurgents were listened to by the Europeans as if they were labouring under the influence of a horrid nightmare.

Nana Sahib acted up consistently to his caste

principles of hatred and loathing for the unclean usurpers, with whom no promise could be binding, no faith kept by one of his grade, his fury accentuated with the knowledge that for the present he had forfeited, through those defiled ones, his own privileges as a Brahmin; all his present desire was to get over the dirty work as quickly as possible, and return once again to his long penance and purification.

Therefore his watchword became "Destroy all Faringhee life, no matter how young, trap them with wiles as the foxes are trapped, and exterminate them root and branch."

He did not trouble himself with how the work was accomplished; to his lieutenant Tantia Topí and the other commanders, Hindoo and Mahommedan, he left the sickening details to be arranged as they thought fit. The sons of Islam, themselves little better than swine in his estimation, with the miscreants and gaol-convicts whom they had liberated, might outrage, torture or mutilate as they felt inclined, so long as they did not waste too much valuable time in the operation; he delivered the accursed Feringhee into their clutches with but one condition, "Let no man, woman or child escape."

So he rode on his elephant, or beautiful war-steed, between his palace and his royal tent, and superintended the works which his skilled sepoy engineers were throwing up against the British, while Tantia Topí with his Hindoos, or Azim-Ullah with his Mahommedans, conducted assaults hourly on those pent-up prisoners; when a party of captives were brought before Nana, he merely said "Shoot them down," and turned his head carelessly to watch the progress of the siege.

How General Wheeler came to decide upon that open and almost defenceless site in the plains, when he might have had his choice of position on the other side of the city, where the magazine stood, is one of the many mysteries of that fatal war. There was only one well where drinking water could be had in the locality, and that was of indifferent quality and deficient in quantity even for the necessities of his small force, and lying in such an exposed position under the range of the enemy's battery that it was almost certain death to approach it; indeed, between sunstroke and the getting to this well, he lost more of his men uselessly than those who fell in actual battle.

But for all that seeming first error of locality, the defence of Cawnpore must be regarded as the most dauntless and brilliant epoch in this Iliad, and made Nana tremble in his own heart for the success of his crusade. A mere handful of men and weak women, with water, food and ammunition running short, with two or three guns only to depend upon, in that scanty space and under the intolerable heat of June, keeping at bay those almost countless hordes of heat-loving Asiatics, with their unlimited supply of heavy field-pieces, shot and ammunition.

"We have but to approach them, and they will dissolve like dew before the sun," observed Nana, grandiloquently, as he overlooked his own legions, splendid armament, and superb English-trained gunners and marksmen, and then turned his heavy lidded eyes in the direction of that little fort on the plain, and his generals echoed his words with easy confidence as to the result.

That was on the first morning of the siege, and

braced up by the same confidence his armies rushed up and surrounded the fort like locusts, swarming over the barricades with savage yells, to be met by the dauntless defenders, and driven back at the point of the bayonet again and again, with such heavy losses, that the Nana, with demoniac rage in his heart, had at last to call them off and leave the game in the hands of the long-range gunners and sharp-shooters.

General Wheeler had only six guns of different sizes to mount upon his entrenchments, and *four feet* high earthworks; he had done his best with his sappers, but found it almost impossible to work that ground, baked to an iron-like hardness by the fierce sun which had blazed upon it for the past seven months without a drop of rain. With him he had two hundred and ten English soldiers and about a hundred civilians and officers, with another hundred traders, clerks and railway engineers, and less than fifty other Christian natives and drummers, that is four-hundred and fifty men and boys to look after and protect three hundred and thirty women and children, whom they could not leave or run the risk of taking with them, otherwise in their desperation they might have fought their way out of that hornets' nest.

Nana himself being a priest and fanatic rather than a military commander, had no more sense of mercy or chivalry than had that stern puritan Oliver Cromwell, at the battle of Dunbar, whom the gods had delivered into his hands he considered that it was his holy duty to destroy without delay; that fine old hero of Carlyle's had likewise the same notion of dispatch with heretics and blasphemers, although in his case it was his own race he was removing, while in that of this Oriental

patriot the race was totally different from his, being out-castes, usurpers and strangers in the land. The Roundheads also were no more averse to the torturing of their own countrymen with thumb-screws, red-hot pincers and other delectable implements of ancient science than were the adherents of the Peshwa with their native contrivances on their prisoners when they proved obstinate; on the whole, perhaps, the indiscriminate slaughter and outrage was no worse in this land of ardent sunshine than it was in Merry England during the days when the perjured Stuart was fighting for his crown, although years have softened down the details of the older atrocities. When a people have what they consider tyrants and oppressors in their power they are not given to charity or mercy, neither in the East nor in the West, while in the first fever of their war-lust.

Nana was not a patriot in the sense that Wallace or Bruce can be regarded, for he was not a fighting man; he might cut the head from a slave who had raised his ire, but he had not learnt to use his sword in his own defence; he was content like King Charles to give his moral support to his army, and that was all they expected from him.

Tantia Topí, his right-hand man-at-arms, was the Napoleon of that war, supported by such young bloods as Azim Ullah and Rao Sahib. Tantia Topí knew how to fight and direct a battle, and gloried in the game of slaughter as much as did Bismarck or Moltke in France. Nana Sahib could do the promising as much as ever he liked, but it was Tantia who directed the killing, and he did his part with a gusto that placed him on a level with any of our modern European heroes.

Day and night that incessant siege went on without hardly a pause for three weeks, while the scanty provisions were coming to an end, and the well was running dry; those who fell during the day were hauled out to the verandah of the unfinished barracks, and left there until night, when they could be carried outside the entrenchment, and let down into a dry well there which was utilized as the cemetery. Men and boys stood at the guns and apertures fully exposed to the fire of their ruthless foemen, while the women and girls crouched at their feet loading for them, and dying without a murmur.

They had no rest or intervals of truce during that period, for Tantia Topí kept his gunners at work pouring the shell and shot into them without one instant's pause, for while the British were forced to let their six red-hot guns cool down at times, he had an unlimited supply of guns and plenty of water, so that as fast as one got heated he had it rolled away, and another pushed into its place; day and night those well-aimed shots poured at them until their fort was completely riddled through and through, so that they were forced to dig holes under the entrenchment walls, and burrow inside like rabbits, covering the tops with any article they could lay their hands on.

Imagine the heat of these airless ovens under this June sun, with the sky above filled with those flying iron and grape-charged missiles, those bursting bomb-shells, with the smell of dead carcases poisoning the air, and the flies—oh, these Eastern flies!—clustering in myriads upon the living and the dead, and driving the survivors nearly mad with their fierce and irritating touches.

And while the Europeans were diminishing hour after hour, Nana's hosts were being constantly reinforced; landowners with their serfs flocked to his united standards and hailed him as the Peshwa; sepoys swarmed in regiment after regiment from the different stations throughout Oudh, after having massacred their officers and the Europeans residing amongst them, bringing more arms, more ammunition, and greater treasure to his already over-filled coffers; the natives feasted each night in full sight of the besieged, now on very short allowance.

After the second day each man had to look after getting his own supply of water from this dangerous well, and take night for the drawing of it, for it was certain death to approach it by daylight, and nearly as fatal even in that flame-illumined night; they were nearly at the end of their resources, although the sublime courage born of despair never faltered, but they were being slowly reduced one by one, so that the time was not far distant when the waiting enemy would have the field to themselves.

But Nana was impatient at this long delay, for Cawnpore was only the beginning of the campaign, and in his anger he committed terrible outrages and stormed at his leaders to send out men who could fight and finish it up. About a hundred-and-thirty fugitives from Futtyghar, mostly women and children, were caught on the river and butchered wholesale, and after this Nana swore he would wait no longer, for the game of shooting at stones had become monotonous.

What splendid acts of heroism and pluck were done by each of these dauntless defenders no pen could describe, and it would be invidious to mention iso-

lated instances, where each stared Death in the face and defied him to make them flinch; when the constant excitement of deadly peril kept natural fatigue under, until their muscles and hearts became like tempered steel.

On the evening of the 13th, Tantia Topí led four thousand trained sepoys on to a final assault, after setting fire to the roof of the hospital barracks, where the wounded, sick, women and children lay, and while the Europeans were trying to save the inmates and put out the flames, the Sepoys made the rush, only to be driven back by that handful of white lions.

Forty of their number were burned to death in that fatal fire, but they were the masters still. The Orientals slunk back discomfited and cowed, while Nana spat at them in his fury, and shouted:

"Am I only a king over a pack of curs?"

And so on until the 23rd. Each night a host came on, and went back again defeated.

Fighting, starving, and hoping for the relief which never came. To the east, north and west they looked for help, in vain. They were clearly doomed to perish.

The rain season was also about to set in with its horrors of cholera and other discomforts; clearly some decisive step must be taken to get their helpless ones out of that hell of fire and heat, for the bombardment was carried on more fiercely than ever, and they had not half rations left for three days longer.

As the men looked at their starving women and children, they became frantic to get out, even if they all perished in the attempt. That night over ten thousand natives came against them, and were driven back by the resistless bayonets for the last time, then

with bursting hearts they leaned against their riddled walls, for their guns were now useless and their ammunition at an end.

They were at this most desperate strait when, on the morning of the 24th, an old English lady, Mrs. Greenway, whose life had been spared by Nana for a large ransom and to carry his terms, came in with a letter written by Azzim-Ullah, offering them their lives on the following conditions. "All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie, and are willing to lay down their arms, shall receive a safe passage to Allahábád."

It may have been the dexterous Khan's own device to please his master and get the fight over, for it was not signed, and was received with great doubt by the general, but when he put it to the vote, it was decided to accept the terms; to stay longer those urged who supported the capitulation, was to die with their women and children; better to accept even this doubtful promise for the sake of those they could no longer protect.

CHAPTER IX.

SERGEANT JACKSON IN HEAVEN.

SERGEANT JACKSON woke up after a very long sleep, or rather after a series of sleeps, to find himself in Heaven, that is to say, as far as a soldier's mind can carry him in the way of imagination to picture such a state of bliss, he was in it, safe and sound.

It wasn't exactly a city with golden streets and crystal rivers, where white-robed angels sat in countless rows stringing their golden harps in the perpetual

sunshine. It was a soldier's Heaven he woke up to, a state of rest and comfort, with good living, free drinking, plenty of tobacco, and dress enough to satisfy the most dandified of sensualists.

He remembered in a dim, vague fashion, the chit of a girl who had given him the fragrant cigar, while he was famishing in the jungle, and the going to sleep before he had rightly tested the flavour of that cigar; then at intervals after that the rolling motion of being carried upon a stretcher, with a strangely perfumed napkin always, like the cigar, sending him back to sleep again before he could get a right sniff at it, as it was laid gently over his face, by some one beside him. That was all concerning the sleeping and dreaming that he could recollect, as he opened his eyes and lay for a few moments, passively looking up at a far-off white light or window above him; then with a mighty yawn he turned himself about and got up on his elbow to see what sort of a hospital they had brought him to, for he naturally concluded that he must be seriously wounded somewhere about his anatomy, since he had been carried.

"Head split open, I suppose," he muttered, as he put up his hand and felt carefully over his crisp curls, now considerably longer than the regimental code permitted, the only pain he was conscious of being centred under them.

"Nothing smashed there. Ah! fever, perhaps," he again muttered, as he became conscious of a raging thirst and a lime-kiln of a throat, therefore in instinctive response to that powerful craving, he looked farther a-field, to see beside him a table lavishly provided with all that could allay that trouble.

"By Jove! but this is a mighty liberal hospital," he cried, as he sprang to his feet, and went over to the table, where, dazzled by the variety, he stood pondering like an epicure upon what to take first.

There was a goodly row of bottled beer and stout, whose familiar labels attracted his sparkling eyes first, half-a-dozen of massive crystal decanters with silver labels hanging from their brimming necks, drew his attention from the more homely black bottles; each of the silver shields bore upon it a different device, such as, "Brandy," "Scotch Whisky," "Irish Ditto," "Hollands," "Rum," "Gin"—welcome tokens all of them, but confusing a little to a man who was trying to decide, after three weeks of total abstinence, what form his first quencher should take, so that he might with impunity sample the gallery afterwards.

From those square and massive temples of crystal, his eyes roved over others of different designs, also seeming to supplicate the favour of his custom by a wanton display of their charms and titles. Amontillado and crusted Port represented the sunny land of the Dons, with many other seductive strangers to the sergeant's limited experience, such as: "Clos-de-Vougeôt," "Montrachet," and "Chablis," "Châteaux" by the dozen, all different in their surnames and avowed ages, with some hard-reading German titles, which he passed over for a more leisurely inspection. They were *en evidence* and that was enough, if it was not all a portion of his late delirium.

"Have I been carried by mistake into the officers' mess bar?" he ejaculated wildly, as he tugged at his moustache with both hands, to convince himself that he wasn't still sleeping, while he glared incredulously at the large and loaded table.

"Sahib, he want something to drink? Sahibs mostly want this first thing on waking up. Try brandy and soda, or glass-o'-beer, or maybe iced champagne, very good champagne, this—I recommend it much to sahib, before he take his bath."

The bewildered sergeant started at the soft voice, and looked round to see a polite young native, dressed in white linen, standing at his side and pointing to an ice-pail, within which reposed several bottles with golden tops on them.

"Yes, I'll try the champagne first, Bachna; draw me a bottle, and as quick as you can, for I've a head like a bee-hive."

He had once tasted champagne before while waiting at mess, and did not object to the flavour, although beer or whisky were more to his taste, but being the rarest, it would do for a beginning since the waiter advised it, and someone else seemingly had the paying for it.

"What you prefer, sahib, Clicquot, Pommery, Moët et Chandon, Pol Roger?"

"Ah, give me a dose of Paul Roger, and don't crack your darkey jaws over any more of the foreign languages," cried the sergeant impatiently, and the next minute he was dipping his nose amongst the fairy bubbles that soared to the surface of that open glass.

Again and again the obedient youth filled up that bumper, while the cooling liquid rushed over that thirsty throat. In as many moments, two bottles lay empty on the floor and then the sergeant felt that life was worth struggling for, as his next instinct, so long held in abeyance, woke up.

"I could eat something more solid than these fruits, Bachna, if it's handy?"

"Better take your bath first, sahib, for you require washing very much, and then you can eat plenty with good appetite."

"Ah, the appetite is here all right, and has been here for a considerable time," replied the lucky sergeant with a laugh, as he patted his waistbelt. "But perhaps you are right, Bachna, for it's three weeks since my face saw soap or water, so lead on, Macduff, and let's get the necessary ablutions over as fast as possible."

The Bachna was a well-trained valet, who had evidently served a commissioner at the least in his loyal days, for he had the sergeant stripped and into the prepared bath before he had time to inspect his surroundings; then, as the soldier indolently stretched his shapely form upon the marble slab, the boy deftly shampooed and scrubbed him until it felt like taking off an outer skin; after this operation, he wallowed amongst the perfumed water, and rose from it like a pink Achilles, a new man.

"Sahib, your old clothes very dirty and worn, here are new ones for you; which will you wear, the captain's, major's, general's, or rajah's?"

As he spoke, the boy opened a large chest, and brought out several regimental suits, and also a very rich Oriental robe, and displayed them to the astonished eyes of the sergeant, who now lay in a new silk shirt on the cushions, while he puffed at a preparatory cigar.

"I say, Bachna, where the dickens am I?"

"You are a prisoner of war, sahib, and that charm

you wear brought you very kind jailor, you know who!" replied the boy archly.

"Ah, that's it, is it, and when am I to see her?"

"When you dressed, sahib, you no like lady to see your legs so."

"Ha! ha!—you are a rascal, Bachna. Well, what should I wear? since you are so wise in other matters, advise me on this."

"Well, sahib, the one whom you know does not like Faringhee much, only one she cares about and she treat him better if she forget that he is Faringhee, therefore I advise that you dress yourself to please her, and wear this one."

The boy held up the state robe as he spoke, and the sergeant nodded, lazily.

"After you dress and eat, sahib."

"By Jove, boy, that remark of yours has made me feel bad again, I'll eat first and dress afterwards, so drop the toggery and fetch me anything solid as fast as you can bring it on."

"I bring you, in a moment, just what I know you like, sahib, for I have had good service and know all that sahibs like."

During the time that the bachna was gone the sergeant looked about him curiously, while speculating which part of the country he had been brought to, but about which his surroundings gave him no hint, otherwise than that he was immured in an underground chamber, and, from the ornaments on the walls, belonging to one professing the faith of Islam.

Originally natural caverns, the apartment he was in had been partitioned off as a bathing chamber, and lined with marble and mirrors for fully eighteen or

twenty feet up the walls, above which great open spaces yawned, by which the air entered cool and fresh.

Over his head, at a distance of perhaps sixty or more feet, the only windows of the place were fixed; protected from the outer space with opaque glass or some other transparent material, they permitted enough light to filter down to give a church-like effect to the apartment, which was, however, further lighted by lamps fixed on sconces and brackets.

It was a large room for the purpose designed and simple in its arrangements, having as furniture only that side table which had first attracted the sergeant's eyes, a few chairs of English workmanship, with a couch also English, and four large clothes chests of sandal wood and ebony with iron and silver clamps.

The bath occupied the farthest end of the room and stretched from side to side, being about four yards long and two and a half broad, with a varying depth of three to ten feet, so that there was room enough for a good plunge. Other appliances for washing lay about beside the shampooing slab or table, basins and hand baths of varying sizes, all on a costly and refined scale.

Over against where the sergeant lay smoking he could see his reflection in the panel opposite, a reflection which consoled him greatly, for he was not looking much the worse of his late trying experiences, a little thinner in the cheeks and more sunburnt, but more interesting, and as handsome as ever; he wished to look well before the woman who had protected him so long, for he meant to enjoy his term of captivity in every way possible, in fact, as he put it mildly to himself, "do a proper bust while about it."

The bachna was longer than the minute stipulated while a church-like stillness reigned over the place which did not harmonize with the gallant sergeant's ideas about a holiday; it was cool, comfortable, and got up regardless of expense, with that lavish buffet left to his discretion; but he liked chums when on a drinking bout and he abhorred solitude, which forced him to think about the dead faces of those his sword and bayonet had sent to their last account, and so made duty appear almost as ugly as downright murder; it made him also feel mean and selfish to be enjoying himself while that devoted band from whom he had been kidnapped were still at large, famishing and fighting for their lives. But he consoled himself that he was a prisoner, and therefore could do nothing to help them as yet.

"I'll interest this Begum on their behalf. If she found me in the jungle, she can make times easier for them also I daresay."

He rose and moved over once more to the table, ignoring the washy champagne this time, but helping himself to a stiff allowance of brandy and soda-water.

"They tell me that sherry and bitters are the correct things before dinner, but as I cannot see any bitters here, and don't exactly know which is the sherry amongst that lot of outlandish names, I'll stick to the tipple I do know until my smart bachna comes back and gives me the benefit of his experience."

At this moment the attendant returned with some covered dishes on a tray, which he placed before the sergeant, removing the cover and saying:

"That correct, sahib, I think, beeftake cooked on silver grill, under-done, with potato in uniform. That

your style, sahib, I think, with bottle stout and bitter, eh?"

"My boy," said Sergeant Jackson, with solemn conviction and fervour, as he regarded these revealed gastronomic joys, "wherever you have been trained, they have not neglected your education, no, not in one damned particular. Did you grill that steak and boil those spuds?"

"Of course, sahib; the potato I put on when I see you open your eyes, that give them plenty time, the beeftake, it do with two turn round, exactly six minutes, twice the time a fresh egg takes, that the way the head cook teach me at Dalhousie Sahib's house, where I first learn."

"And they do you credit, my son, for never have my teeth chawed a juicier or more tasty bit of beef, while as for the praties, flour ain't the word; here's to you, my son."

"Same to you, sahib, only I don't drink stout and bitter; I Mahomedan boy."

"That's your loss, but never mind, when I am king here I'll make you my prime minister and grand vizier, dash me if I don't; but tell me, sonny, what's her name?"

The sergeant was wolfing-in that stupendous steak in great mouthfuls while he spoke, and drinking down huge draughts of half-and-half from the silver tankard into which the boy had emptied the contents of the two bottles, so that his words didn't sound very distinct—a fact that this discreet young Mussulman took advantage of by pretending not to hear.

"Me going to tell you great, big, grand secret, sahib, which you must never tell over again, or you will get me into trouble."

The boy was speaking in a mysterious whisper, so that the sergeant paused in his eating and, with his fork up, inclined his ear to the speaker, thinking that at last his curiosity was about to be satisfied.

"You can depend upon me not getting you into trouble. Say on, for I'll be silent as the grave."

"You eat that beeftake?"

"Yes, but dash it all; nothing dangerous about it, surely—no cussed native treachery—eh?—no poison hocky-pocky?"

"Not that, sahib; but do you know why it is so tender and sweet?"

"No, boy, no—why? Out with the darned secret, or I'll strangle you."

"Because I keep that bullock alive until you open your eyes, then he get killed when the potato go on the fire. That's why him tender and good, because him beeftake cooked before he get cold and tough—there."

If the bachna expected commendation for his grand secret he did not get it from the irate soldier, for he said with an oath:

"Confound it, boy, what has the bull to do with your queen?"

"The bull with my queen? Nothing, sahib. I no say that."

"But I ask you a question, and you reply with this infernal slaughter-yard yarn. What do you mean by fooling me that way, eh? Answer, or I'll smash you."

"You ask me about her, and I tell you she loves you, but no care to see you in your shirt, sahib. You ask me about that steak, and I tell you where it came from, and then you say you will smash me. I call that Feringhee fun, sahib, and no understand it."

The boy salaamed, and then drew himself up with great dignity, while the sergeant returned to his English-made dinner.

"I suppose it's a put-up job," he muttered, "and I ain't going to hear from outsiders. I expect I shall have to worm it out of herself."

He finished the steak rapidly while it was in good condition, and sent after it four bottles of bitter beer and stout mixed; after which, washing his hands and mouth from the basin of rose-water that the boy brought to him, and drying himself on the towel, he selected another cigar from the box at his elbow and lit it with the brand which the boy brought from a glowing brazier that stood on a carved tripod in the centre of the room. Then throwing himself once more on the sofa, flushed and replete, he said:

"You can dress me now, Bachna — what's your name?"

"Patla Dom, sahib."

"Well, let it be Pat for short after this. Now, Pat, look after my hair and moustache carefully; get it up to the proper stiffness, for it has been drooping for the last twenty days. Say, have you got a razor about the premises?"

"Yes, sahib; and I can shave without cutting, also."

"You're a gem of the first water, and I forgive you. Drive ahead and sort me up, so that I don't disgrace my barber and dresser."

"I do you up like a royal rajah, only keep very still, for my life depends upon it."

"Do you say so, Pat?"

"Yes, sahib. You so precious in her eyes, so young, and strong, and beautiful, that a single drop

of blood from your chin would make my poor head fly off before I could wink."

"My blessed optics! but she must be a oner when she is enthusiastic over anything," murmured the gratified soldier, soothed almost asleep by the flattery of the young courtier.

The boy worked as deftly and tenderly as the lady's-maid to a fashionable beauty, and soon had the warrior shaved, washed, perfumed, anointed, and costumed like a modern Sardanapalus, without hardly disturbing his after-dinner siesta.

Over his feet and ankles he drew a pair of the finest flesh-coloured silk stockings, and then the radiant trousers of brocaded sky-blue silk with gold crescents bespangling them, a tunic of cream-tinted cashmere passed over the silken shirt, while round the waist was fastened a belt of gold and gems, with turned-up Indian slippers made from crimson satin with sown pearls for the feet. Then the boy requested him to rise, after he had wound about his brows the turban of gold cloth and precious stones.

Sergeant Jackson got up slowly and proudly and surveyed his fine figure, now looking four inches taller, in the mirror, while Patla invested him with the robe of state—a costume of such wealth of jewels and peacock tints in hand-sewn silk, gold, and silver, that it becomes wisdom to leave it without further description—then the brocade sash of scarlet with the heavy fringes, and the glittering breast-belt, not forgetting the amulet, tulwar with its damascened blade, velvet and gold scabbard, ivory and diamond hilt, and the daggers equally beautiful and priceless.

As he glanced at that gorgeous reflection and gave

a final twist to his golden moustache, his ruddy cheeks flushed with gratified vanity, while his keen blue eyes glittered like sapphires, for he felt himself on a par with the Queen of England, far less the tawny princess of a little province in India.

"Another bottle of fiz, Pat, my hero, with a fresh brand from the burning, and then I'm ready for the court of Venus."

The obedient Patla opened another bottle from the ice-pail, while the radiant one picked out a fresh cigar, and, when he had gulped down the one and fired the other, he followed his guide with a somewhat unsteady but rollicking swing from the bath-room into the next, through a portico shrouded with curtains of velvet, spreading clouds of smoke-like incense around him as he went.

This room was also furnished in a conglomerate style, half English, half Oriental. With the expectation of capturing her bird, the lovely and impassioned jailor had decked it up from the loot of many a demolished bungalow in the way which she thought would best please her hero, and make him content—sofas, chairs, tables, with hangings, carpets and cushions, so that it was like an upholsterer's show-room.

At one end stood a piano in ebony and gilt work, while near at hand was a book-case filled with the books most patronized in British India, religious works and yellow-covered novels. Sergeant Jackson looked at these last specimens of literature with approval, although what pleased him best was to see a billiard table set up with paraphernalia all complete, and several packs of cards and dice-boxes on a little card-table.

"There is corn in Egypt, Pat, I perceive," he remarked to his page. "I think I can take up the struggle for existence here, don't you?"

"Yes, sahib, very nicely; see also Faringhee guns, pistols and swords here plenty."

The soldier glanced round the walls on the arsenal there displayed. Every description of war instrument was here represented, both English and Indian. He saw also what gratified him still more, a rack of pipes, with jars of tobacco, meerschaums, briars, clays, hubble-bubbles and hookahs.

"Yes, Pat, even a hostage of battle may find amusement within these prison walls. Lead on, my friend, lead on."

Patla clapped his hands together three times, and at the third signal a withered and bent old crone put in her appearance and made an obeisance to the sergeant.

"I am not permitted to go farther with your greatness, sahib; that one take you in to where you are wanted for."

The sergeant drew himself up to his full height and put on his most martial swagger as he followed this female out of the room, through several passages and ante-chambers, all gorgeously furnished and lighted by those far-off roof-windows, until, at last, they paused before a closely-curtained doorway, which curtains the aged lady drew apart, as she stepped on one side, and motioned him to enter by himself.

A heavy fragrance of otto of roses and other flower essences filled his nostrils as he strode through the curtains which dropped noiselessly behind him, while a rosy glow from many-shaded lamps dazzled his eyes for

a moment, and then he saw a chamber which, for Oriental splendour and radiant colour of drapery, surpassed all he had ever before witnessed, as from a nest of silk and velvet cushions, sprang up a vision of Oriental loveliness and expectation, clad as he was with jewels and richness, a flashing tiara upon her luxuriant blue-black tresses, and a glow of passion upon her unveiled face, as her star-like eyes beamed upon him in that rapid and bird-like passage to his outstretched arms.

"Aga Jau! my love, my king, my life," she cried, as she sank upon his manly bosom, and sought with hers his hair-covered lips.

She had forgiven that perjury of his at the temple, when, to look upon her uncovered beauty, he had broken his solemn oath; but what will a woman not forgive in the man she loves?

CHAPTER X.

THE MASSACRE.

IT was a damnable deed of treachery and cold-blooded cruelty, that sham armistice of the 26th June at Cawnpore, only to be compared with the relentless policy and double-dealing of Queen Elizabeth and her advisers about her trusting guest, Mary of Scotland, which ended in the latter's bloody taking-off, or some of those other acts of *diplomacy* which have stained the pages of our own and other civilized races' histories; humanity is much the same in all countries and periods, but never so cruel, so remorseless, and so treacherous, as when fighting for a holy cause, with self in the background.

Nana Sahib was fighting for his country, his religion, and his own lost estates—three grand motives which are enough to change the most Christian of monarchs into devils incarnate.

When the lion-hearted Richard went out against the Moslems he took with him the remains of a code of chivalry which greatly impressed the noble Saladin, so that, being what the Romanists term a "'vert" he became the ideal knight-errant, outvied the professional men, and made sacrifices which his masters in those laws often took undue advantage of, but never dreamed of imitating; they were the Christian representatives of chivalry, while he was only a red-hot heathen convert and enthusiast; why, therefore should they give him a chance, when the Holy Cause demanded of them to take advantage of every chance yielded to them for the noble result, and absolved them from all unknightly acts?

Those days of sham chivalry are past and gone, while modern knights do not parade their principles of truth, purity, and honour; indeed they sometimes cover them so effectively that it would be difficult for even the keenest reader of character to know that they existed at all.

Nana Sahib had mixed a good deal with the Christianized English, but he had not been taught the principles of chivalry from that intercourse. He had also a cause, to him as holy as that which sent out the Crusaders to Palestine, and a dispensation from the conclave of his fellow priests which exonerated him from all sins of duplicity or statecraft, and absolved him from all stains to his caste; it was not a crime at all in the eyes of his advisers to cut off the

Faringhee, no more a crime than the cutting off of the Amalekites appeared to the high priest Samuel, but it was a *mistake* that he appeared at all in the transaction; if he had read European history he would have gone away that day on a royal hunting expedition, and left the Mahomedan leader Azzim-Ullah to represent him, and take the blame afterwards, when the Hindoo leader, Tantia Topí ignored his natural rival's treaty and put the capitulated ones to death; that would have been the proper and European mode of conducting such matters of state and expediency, but having committed this sad error in tactics we must all agree that it was a most damnable and hellish act.

He did not sign the letter which Azzim-Ullah sent to the sore-distressed besieged ones, but he signified his knowledge and sanction of it by graciously consenting to receive his old tutor in English, Mr. Tod, who was sent to his head-quarters to obtain his signature to the agreement drawn up between Azzim-Ullah and Jawâla Parshâd and the British representatives, Captains Moore and Whiting, with Postmaster Roche, on the plain outside the entrenchment during the morning. He received his old tutor very courteously and kindly, and expressed his regret for the sufferings of the women and children. That was Nana's mistake; he should have let Jawâla Parshâd do that if Azzim-Ullah would not serve, and sacrificed him afterwards, as good and wise Queen Bess did so often with her faithful supporters.

Mr. Tod, weary and haggard, met his old pupil fresh and debonair in the midst of his new subjects.

"Ah, Tod Sahib, your hand, old friend, I am sorry

that we have become enemies; sorry also for your wives and children that this should be so. But right is Right when it becomes backed by Might, or, as you have taught me, *Aide toi et le ciel t'aidera.*"

"Nana Sahib, Prince of Bithúr," began the ambassador, when Nana sprang up and thundered, his face purple with rage:

"Peshwa of the Marathas, Sahib Tod." Then, subduing his passion by a strong effort, he added softly:

"But let that pass. You Faringhees are hard to convince when once you have agreed to rob a man."

"Your highness, I come before you on behalf of those poor women and children whose sufferings you have just sympathised with. We are enemies, yet would fain believe in your honour as a gentleman; and I believe if you put your signature to this agreement that my countrymen can trust your word."

"You believe this really, Tod Sahib?"

"Yes, your highness," replied the ambassador.

"Give me a pen, Jawala Behadúr; the Prince Dandhu Panth of Bithúr will sign this paper. There, does that satisfy you, Sahib Tod—Dandhu Panth, Prince of Bithúr?"

"Yes, your highness, and may the Lord of Hosts reward you as you treat us."

"Amen, sahib, and good-bye."

They shook hands and parted, Mr. Tod to his party, while Nana Sahib sat before the table where he had signed.

"Burn that pen, and bring me water to cleanse myself from this pollution," said Nana, standing up as soon as the others had got beyond earshot. "You heard the dog refuse the chance I gave him, Azzim-

Ullah—you heard him refuse me my just and lawful title?"

"I heard the fool," replied the other composedly, "and rejoiced."

"Ah, he was the one man whom I would have broken my oath for, and spared out of this accursed lot. Nay, had he demanded my signature as the Peshwa, the whole gang would have been safe as far as Allahabad; but he only asked for the signature of the Prince of Bithúr."

"And Dandhu Panth," whispered a voice in his ear, the far-off conscience-voice of the Bhuddist sage.

"The Prince of Bithúr is no more!" shouted the king wildly. "Tantia Topí, I give over my estate of Bithúr to you and your heirs for ever."

"And with the property I accept the blame," answered his general grimly.

"Good! It is yours from henceforth. Dandhu Panth is a name of the past. I am no longer Dandhu Panth, I am Nana, Peshwa of the Marathas, the Deliverer."

"Nana the Deliverer, Peshwa of the Maratha race," shouted the courtiers who crowded round, on hearing which this royal fanatic sat down with a satisfied smile on his face.

"Now that burden is off my shoulders, Tantia Behadur, you will do your duty."

"Never fear about me, your greatness," replied the general, with a fierce laugh. "I shall do my duty to India and you, so sleep in peace."

* * * * * *

In the shot-riddled camp of the British survivors of that infernal siege their last night was spent in

sorrow, shame, and forebodings, yet without being disturbed by the usual raids and hail of fire. A great stillness reigned over the plain between the lines of the enemy and them. They were allowed to rest or weep in peace at last, for they had won this privilege by the degradation of surrender, after a struggle unexampled as yet in the great deeds which history celebrates. They deserved everything that the mortal who does his level best can deserve, therefore they were left to one night of surcease from fatigue, anxiety, and death.

Strong and dauntless soldiers sat with their backs against the embankments, supporting the heads of their wives and sweethearts on their breasts, and inspiring a confidence in the future which they could not feel, for although they all thought that they would reach Allahabad under the terms of this miserable capitulation, they dreaded the reception they might meet there, for no news had come to them from the outside to inform them of how things were going on in other portions of India—bad, they feared, since no help had come to them.

Gentle women, worn out with prolonged suffering, listened to these whispered hopes with dead hearts and dry eyes, while they clutched their sleeping little ones nervously to their bosoms. Hope would never again be lighted in those extinguished hearts, although the rest which they were now tasting might be prolonged throughout eternity. Wives and husbands, parents and children, friends and lovers, were spending their last still night together on earth ; on the morrow they would meet in that sphere where marriages are not known, so let us leave them in peace to murmur

and weep their last farewells to the old order of things and prepare for the new.

* * * * * *

If that wonderful visionary, William Blake, saw correctly, and the souls of military men come back to earth in the form of fleas, then that unmitigated fighting man, Tantia Topí, was qualifying himself to become a monarch of this race of midnight tormentors, and was preparing to deserve richly the annihilating crack of doom which would be his portion at the future hands of the avenging fair sex for the crimes he had committed in human shape upon their predecessors, for he had an infinite relish for blood.

No considerations of caste troubled his robust mind, for he had long since outlived the superstitions of his race; he made a good general of the sanguinary and remorseless type, could eat his kabobs with any Mussulman, and quaff down his claret or Cognac with any Faringhee, as well as slaughter his hundreds of men, women and children, without suffering a pang of compunction afterwards; in fact he was Bismarck, Moltke and Bonaparte all rolled into one, and that is a combination fit for anything in the shape of a comfortable conscience and the easy digestion of gore.

He was attached to his master the Peshwa and his country as the first two rival heroes were attached to the Emperor and Fatherland, but I doubt if even they had the pure inherent love of fighting and indiscriminate slaughter of the enemy that he had; they have shown themselves pretty strong in that way, of course, but in his limited sphere of action Tantia Topí surpassed them.

Powerfully-built, dark-visaged and fearless, as well

as a perfect master for seizing upon emergencies, he leapt joyously into the war and proved himself to be the ruling spirit in it from first to last; all he wanted was action, without a thought about posing for the admiration of posterity.

He took his present of Bithúr calmly, careless whether he was allowed to hold it or not, as a trust from and for his more scrupulous king, and, after a good night's sleep, he rose next morning refreshed and energetic, to complete his arrangements for the day's fell work.

The forty transport boats were placed in order on the river Jumna at a ghaut or landing-place, about a mile distant from the barracks; Tantia Topí considered this merely a piece of useless sentiment, as he could as easily have shot the captives down on the banks, but both Nana and Azim-Ullah insisted on this part of the arrangement being carried out, from an idea that, once embarked on the river, the captives were beyond their jurisdiction, and that they had fulfilled their written contract by conveying them safely out of Cawnpore; the robust Tantia shrugged his shoulders over this punctilio, but gave way good-naturedly; it suited him quite as well to do the work on the water as on dry land.

Therefore he arranged his sharp-shooters and artillery on both sides of the high river banks, while he took up his position on the platform of the temple of Sati-Chaura, from which the landing-place took its name, where he could overlook the embarkation and direct the slaughter.

About eight o'clock in the morning that devoted band of unarmed men, with their women and children

reached the boats, after traversing that mile of horror between the ranks of their ruthless enemies.

The river being very low and shallow at the sides, they had to wade ankle-deep through the water and mud before they could reach the waiting boats and be drawn over the sides, so that it took them over an hour to embark; however, at last they were all on board and beginning to congratulate themselves that the worst was over, while they began to push off.

Suddenly the clear notes of a bugle were heard from the heights where Tantia sat watching them, at which the native boatmen scrambled over the sides and scuttled ashore as fast as they could run.

And then the St. Bartholomew game commenced, and the guns, which had been carefully placed and aimed, opened fire and belched out their heavy charges of grape, while the sepoys sent volley after volley without intermission into those crowded decks.

It was all over in a very few minutes; the unarmed soldiers tried frantically to push off, but in vain, for the boats stuck fast in the mud. The women rushed shrieking under the thatch awnings over the decks, but these were quickly set on fire, and so they were forced out again to face as best they could that murderous and continuous shower.

On the wrecked decks lay mounds of the dead of both sexes, for, although the sepoys aimed as much as possible at the defenders, and therefore the destruction was mostly amongst the men, they were packed so closely that it was impossible to find for each bullet its appointed billet. Some few sprang overboard and were despatched there promptly, then the murderers rushed down in a body and put all the

male survivors and wounded to death with the sword and bayonet, dragging those that were left alive of the women and children ashore, and shutting them inside a brick building near the residence of the chief commissariat officer of the division, for Nana and Tantia Topí to settle their after fate.

Only one out of these forty boats escaped from the Sati-Chaura ghaut amid the smoke which hung over them from the guns and the burning thatch roofs of the boats. Not for long, however, did they escape the eagle eyes of Tantia, who sent two boats after them and a body of sepoys to follow along the banks, and who followed them so close and so persistently that, in spite of many gallant and daring after charges, when they had recaptured some muskets, only four men escaped to tell the tale, to wit, Captains Mowbray Thomson and Delafosse, with Privates Murphy and Sullivan, who were taken in and protected by a friendly Rajah on the Oudh side of the river.

Nana Sahib was inclined to find fault with his lieutenant Tantia for taking any prisoners at all, but on his representing that some of the Mahommedan leaders wanted wives for their zenanas he passed that matter over with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

"Ah well! let it be for the present; these women cannot harm us if they consent to abjure their accursed faith. Now let us rejoice, for the land is ours—ours at last. Our usurpers are no more. We are now in reality Peshwa of the Marathas, as was our great father Savaji."

Saying which, he broke up the camp and marched back to the palace of Bithúr with his princes, chiefs

and troops, where he held a grand coronation feast, and had the place illuminated until it shone upon the waters like a palace of light, while the guns fired off royal salutes to himself as Peshwa, and to his brother Bala as Governor-General; to his other friends and supporters he gave appointments and titles, finishing up the ceremonies by an open-air speech to his captains and soldiers, in which he lauded their courage, loyalty, and patriotism.

He was well pleased with himself and the success of his revolt so far; the Maulavi was amongst his councillors, having come in a day or two before with the satisfactory news that the natives were universally successful throughout the country, and that the few stations as yet holding out only required the presence of his armies to be annihilated. On hearing these glad tidings, Nana, no longer entertaining a doubt about the final issue of his holy war, blessed his people and retired to the comfort of his zenana.

And while he triumphantly boasted to his admiring wives about his great and glorious victories at Cawnpore and elsewhere, the avengers were coming, by forced marches, from Calcutta, under the leadership of that thin-faced Christian soldier, Sir Henry Havelock, coming on like hungry tigers to shed buckets of native blood for every drop he had caused to be shed of British.

And while he made merry in the palace, no longer his, and the avengers hurried on with set teeth and glaring eyes, that mystic Bhuddist monk, Jasim Saky Muni, sat within his secret hiding-place upon the mountains, wrapt in a solemn meditation about the end.

Book Third.—Retribution.

CHAPTER I.

HECTOR ONCE MORE.

THE fugitives from Delhi had now been eight weeks on the road, hiding amongst caves, passes and temples, sometimes getting shelter for a few days at a time with some friendly but timid Rajah, or even more timorous but loyal peasant, who were forced at length to bid them move on when suspicious attention was turned upon them.

They were often put to hard straits these benefactors of theirs, but once they had yielded hospitality, not even the poorest betrayed their confidence; they hid the refugees in their rooms, even contaminated their zenanas with their presence, while the search parties were about, and often left themselves destitute in order that the dangerous guests might have the means to satisfy their hunger, and hardly could they persuade even the most destitute to accept the rings and ornaments which they tried to force upon them as a slight return for their noble sacrifice, so sacred were the laws of hospitality considered by these simple-minded natives.

This rising was not regarded with favour by the industrious poor of the land; they had household legends of their own, handed from father to son, of the former rules of both Marathas and Moguls, which

did not impress them with any desire to welcome back the return of either power as arbitrators of their destinies; there were stories of heads, noses and ears cut off when the serfs' ancestors went to ask justice for their grievous wrongs and oppressions, if they had not money enough to bribe the ministers of this blind goddess, while under the British rule, although they still were oppressed and taxed to the utmost limit of their means, they were not deprived of these ornamental and necessary appendages, nor yet made slaves of; when the famine came and starved them out, they were permitted to go and seek fortune elsewhere, which was a great boon; their sons and daughters also got paid for the work they did for the Faringhee, some on the railroads and factories, and others in the service of the Government, which enabled them to get out of the clutches of the shark money-lender, while, under the Peshwas and Moguls, when the crops failed, the farmer and all his family became slaves, and could never more be independent or free; so the small farmers, being meditative and peace-loving men, had considered the matter impartially, and decided, that is, the majority of the farmers, to remain faithful to their new masters, when they could do so without getting themselves into trouble.

But these peace-lovers were only a small and despised minority throughout the country, swarming with fanatics, armed sepoys, professional bandits, and liberated criminals of the vilest and most desperate character, so that the fugitives were often hunted like wild boars for days at a stretch, and driven far out of their course, hence the long

time they had taken to travel between Delhi and Cawnpore.

Major Mortimer was by universal voice chosen leader of the expedition, and very well had the keen-headed but short-tempered little man acquitted himself of this duty, with the help of the brave men under him, and which, happily, had been augmented by other European fugitives from various stations ; they managed to keep their numbers up in spite of the casualties so constantly taking place, and literally fought their way foot by foot as they went along.

They buried many of their own dead on this weary pilgrimage, but they also left a great number more of the marauders for the vultures and kites to look after.

At nights on the camping ground, or when hiding in caves and deserted buildings, they listened to woeful records from those who had joined them, or whom they had been the means of rescuing ; records of horrors which blanched the cheeks of the boldest, and drew many a dry sob from their hearts ; at times also they came upon and buried skeletons that had been crucified or hung, and which some trembling villager told them had been once a Faringhee woman or man.

Sometimes, although rarely, they were in time to save some countryman or woman from being sacrificed to the gods in the temples ; for, now that the British authority was suspended, the worshippers were returning to their old custom of offering human victims instead of cows, sheep or doves, and the colour which covered those hideous altars was no longer the red ochre, but the life fluid which it had represented in

time past. More frequently they came upon the victim slaughtered and past their aid, than upon the intended victim still alive.

They were at present in possession of one of the obscure forest temples devoted to Siva, the demon, and his terrible spouse, Kali, upon which they had swooped while the sacrifice was going on, and saved two women and three children, although two had already been murdered.

It was a true English bayonet charge which had cleared this temple of its savage devotees, criminals most of them; and since blood was what pleased Siva, they had offered up a liberal enough sacrifice of the miscreants to propitiate that Devil-God and make him interested in their uncertain fortunes.

Forty-three devotees lay pierced through and saturating the stone pavement with their life stream, while the others, with their priests, fled, as the victors charged up to the hercat or wooden scaffold, where one naked victim, a little boy, was still held, and the headless body of the other, his mother, was stretched beside him, while her head, decked in flowers, had been placed before the idol. One of the ladies whom they were in time to save from the Khundah, had gone mad at the sight of her friends' doom, and was found sitting with staring eyes speechless and frozen with horror, the other, of a hardier constitution, had managed to retain her senses, and so was able to tell her deliverers how she and her companions had been caught.*

* See "The Annals of Rural Bengal," page 127, by Sir W. W. Hunter, K.C.S.I., C.I.E., M.A. (Oxford); LL.D. (Cambridge).

It was the usual story of disaster and suffering; after witnessing the death of their husbands, who had perished at their posts, these poor widows with their children had, with the aid of some of the native servants, made their escape from the fort, and were afterwards abandoned by these servants who, on the first impulse, had been so kind and faithful.

For weeks they had wandered aimlessly about the jungle, until at last they had fallen into the clutches of these low-caste Siva worshippers and brought to the altar.

Every tale told to these wanderers was filled with woe and hopeless disaster; whichever way they turned it was the same, death to the British and triumph to the Oriental.

They were now about thirty miles from Cawnpore, and as this temple occupied a good position for defence, standing as it did in an isolated position on the banks of one of the many branches of the Jumna River, Major Mortimer decided to remain here until he could hear how affairs were at that latter city; it was fortunate that he did so, otherwise his party would most certainly have shared the fate of the fugitives from Futtyghur.

Dense forest land lay about this granite temple, which proved that the inhabitants were scarce, *i.e.*, settlers. It was not of great dimensions, although very solidly built, another advantage in its favour, as it would be the more easily explored and defended; it had also a hoary and unoccupied look about it, which convinced the experienced major that the devotees who had made use of it were a passing band of Dacoits with their travelling holy men, for many of

these wandering bands of robbers, like Robin Hood, if I may compare a robber so gentle with wretches so ruthless, carried their own dirty equivalents to rosy Friar Tuck.

The blood about the feet of the monster god was fresh, alas! but he could see that before this many a long month had passed since devotees howled before that image; therefore, having given the quietus to a big half of the passing congregation, who were all of the male sex, the major did not greatly fear the remainder; he felt convinced that with his company of hardened warriors he could dispose of them and more.

Therefore, calling his council together, he placed his plans before them and won their entire approval; it was resolved that they would first clear the place, and demolish the idol (this was a suggestion of Letitia's, who vowed that she could not say her prayers with this gory demon grinning upon her), after which they would set their pickets, and appoint their hunters for forest game, while Sammy and the faithful Afghans, who had stuck to them through every reverse, would go on a scouting expedition to Cawnpore, and either bring them relief, or else discover where they were likely to find a shelter.

The preparing of their sacred domicile was soon accomplished, the English victims were consigned to mother Earth as so many of their companions had been before, while the Siva-worshippers were thrown from the bank into the tributary of the Jumna, where the eagles, kites and vultures soon fastened upon them as they floated away.

Then Siva, the god of bloodshed, was made to

descend from his high place by one party, while the others brought water from the stream in their helmets, with the other brass and earthenware vessels which the peasants had bestowed upon them, and washed the evil stains away. By mid-day, the place was ready for occupation.

The Santal adherents were good sportsmen with the bow and arrow, and these simple implements they had been able to buy or manufacture as they went along, so the major deputed that section of his company to go and hunt in the forest for the benefit of the community, a task which they readily undertook, knowing, as they did, that they would not be so much observed by the roving desperadoes as white men were likely to be.

While the Santals were gone, some of the younger members explored the temple.

"A poor sort of a place," remarked Major Walters, as he led the way round. "Scant enough, Green, eh?"

"It is," remarked his obedient satellite, who, during the journey, when free for a moment from fighting, had been occupying himself with consoling the widow Finch; he could not flirt very well with her in her present condition of bereavement, bereavement in more ways than one, for, besides the loss of her husband, she had torn her only dress off her back, and now appeared in abbreviated petticoat, much tattered, and grass-woven shawl, and it is not easy to pay compliments to a lady who has not had the opportunity of washing her face or dressing her hair for eight weeks, particularly if you are in the same condition yourself.

Still, he could always talk gravely and sympathetically, while she could look grateful out of those dove-like eyes, the sweetness of which no suffering could diminish.

She did not go about with the men now. She was sitting with her little daughters amongst the women, and they all liked her, for she was a brave little woman, and as good as gold in spite of her past record. Lieutenant Green had considered a great deal about her during that interval of suffering, and had almost come to the conclusion that if his father, the baronet, from whom he depended for his lavish income, didn't kick up too rough, he might do worse than become a step-father to those pretty cherubs, when the keen edge of the widow's sorrow was worn blunt.

After the ugly idol had been cast down a cavity was discovered behind it, with some steps leading away down into darkness, and as no single man there had a streak of cowardice about him, they penetrated the hidden depths without hesitation.

Twenty-six steps in the blackness brought them to the nether regions, which they discovered to be a series of chambers with daylight let in from the top, where bars were placed, and over which a tangle of forest creepers had grown, so that the light came down dim and green.

In the first chamber a colony of temple snakes of various kinds and sizes, from the cobra to the anaconda, rose against their intrusion with angry hisses. These very unwelcome inhabitants, who had evidently been left to breed wild, gave these daring warriors a busy quarter of an hour demolishing them with their

swords and muskets, after which they went on with their investigations.

"At last we may have a good, cool drink of water," cried the major, as he saw in front of him one of those underground tanks where the water is preserved cool and sweet.

"By Jove! and what is this?" he cried, as he felt something soft and moist touch his hand.

"Your dog, Hector, sir," replied Sammy, who followed close at his heels. "He has smelt us all the way from Meerut, where I had to leave him when I broke my parole."

It was, indeed, that noble sleuth-hound, who had traced the scent of his master and found him through all the blood which had been shed in Oudh during the last eight weeks.

The major stopped in amazement, as did the others with him, to regard this absentee, who had long since been given up as lost.

Gaunt and rough in the hide as an old lion who had lost his teeth and taken to man-eating, with his ribs out-starting and his lurid eyes deep-sunk within his narrow brows; the light was feeble here, but yet strong enough to reveal many a half-healed, blood-congealed cut and scar upon that rough and patchy hide. As they bore the traces of their sufferings upon them, so did Hector bear the imprints of his solitary wanderings, although he could not give them the story in words.

Lieutenant Green expressed his feelings in two words, which expressed a good deal from him:

"By Jove!"

Major Waters felt a grip at his heart and a sudden

rush of moisture to his dry eyes, as he grated out hoarsely, turning away his head so that no one might see his weakness:

"The damned scoundrel! So he has turned up again like a bad half-penny."

But Sammy Tompkins was down on the damp slabs near the tank's edge, biting at the long ears, while the tears rolled over his wan cheeks as he hugged his old chum round the neck and drew him down upon his chest, while the hound licked away the salt flood.

"Hector! Hector! you awful cuss, how are ye, my dear old pal?"

At this moment a sudden shout from above roused them up:

"To arms! to arms, below there! The enemy is upon us!"

CHAPTER II.

SERGEANT JACKSON GETS WEARIED OF PARADISE.

HEAVEN ceases to deserve its name the moment a soul becomes discontented with that state, it is a hell then to this unhappy one, and because he cannot get away from it, each hour accentuates his restless misery until the flames seem to lap him round and torture him past endurance.

Sergeant Jackson had been one month in his underground paradise, with all his desires gratified as soon as expressed, excepting one—the natural desire to go away from it all, and that desire was devouring him now with flames of hell's own raising.

If he had been confined to a bare cell and fed on

bread and water, he might still have sung and defied fate to disturb his equanimity; but to have everything which the heart of soldier can desire, a loving and devoted but remarkably firm-minded houri, with the other comforts of life in lavish profusion around him, and far too easily within his reach, and only the one little boon, "liberty," denied him, that was what poisoned all the other pleasures and robbed them of their delight.

For the first two or three days all went well and gaily, and he felt that life would be too brief a space for the liberal programme of delights spread out before him, and during that time he behaved splendidly, ate and drank enough to make him comfortable, and well pleased with himself, acted tenderly to the royal lady who had chosen him amongst men, and he did not require any extra champagne to keep up the fervour necessary for the occasion.

After about a week, however, the unwonted luxury and indulgence began to tell upon both his constitution and spirits. He grew "liver-ry" and out of sorts, took moody fits of heavy smoking and drinking, which did not improve the trouble, growled like a bear with a bad head at the indefatigable and adroit Patla, and *allowed* himself to be fondled and made much of by the infatuated Queen, who debased herself cheerfully to be the slave of all his caprices, so that he might be held in her silken leash, and not get out to risk his precious life while the war was raging.

On that point she was adamant so long as he professed to love her.

"If you no longer love me, Aga Jau, I will open your prison door and let you depart to the doom

you seek," she answered him calmly, yet with a glow in her dark eyes which warned the astute sergeant not to give that reason as an excuse for wishing to join his countrymen.

She learned to take a hand at cards, billiards, and dice with him, and when she understood these games properly, permitted him to win large sums from her with an easy grace, pleased to think that so small a thing should for the moment interest him.

This little weakness of his did not all decrease her unbounded affection and admiration for him, as the ideals of Mahommedan ladies are not very lofty where their heroes are concerned, and all she asked from him was fidelity; for, having made up her mind to raise him to her own level, she meant to have this condition strictly carried out, to be the sole partner of his pleasures and keep him as her consort; it was her first real love affair, and she behaved herself much in the same way as one of her English sisters would have done, that is, she loved him intensely, yet did not intend to trust him altogether, like an inexperienced girl; she had been a wife once already, and that made all the difference.

They were both playing a part with each other in this game of love. The man dreaded a scene with this woman, who was all passion to him in her faith about her own fascination, she knew how beautiful she was, and felt it only natural that he should love her as he said he did, yet she was so filled with rabid hatred towards his race that she made no secret about the matter, although she did not tell him how she had ordered the general massacre of them throughout her dominions. She did not tell him this, because she had

no wish to make him sad or angry over such a trifle, but she forbade him leaving his prison for the present until her subjects had once more returned to order, and she would not gratify his curiosity about her title, not until the time had come when he could be recognised openly as her husband.

Sergeant Jackson had promised her everything she asked for on their first re-union, as men will sometimes do when they wish to knock down obstacles in the way of their pleasures. "Love laughs at vows," and the sergeant had vowed, and sworn while he kissed, with the same eagerness that he had swilled down the champagne, laughing, as love is supposed to do, in his own heart, at the ridiculousness of his keeping one of these oaths.

Yes, he would become Mussulman for her sweet sake (that was when her head lay on his breast on that first day, after the beef-steak and the libations), and when that ceremony was over they would go through all the rites of her religion, and settle down quietly, so the vows had been made and the woman satisfied that her hero was sincere.

But since then the wines had lost their first flavour, and the cigars might have been only ordinary cheroots for all the difference that the prisoner could tell between them.

She was beautiful still in the Sergeant's eyes; he could not deny that even in his most discontented moments, when she posed and danced for his amusement while he lay and smoked with his glass always handy; he thought he had never looked upon anything finer, and if he could only have got away from her for a time, or she had not been so demonstrative in her

affections, he would have returned to her as spoony as ever.

But to be cooped up like a tame canary when outside the boys were distinguishing themselves, to be everlastingly pawed over, and have to pretend he liked it better than liberty and action, even with all the inducements of eating, drinking, smoking, and rupee-winning—it was getting infernal in its monotony.

True he had a pretty considerable range of underground premises to exercise in, and plenty of servants to bully if he felt inclined, both male and female, only with the exception of the boy Patla the males were mutes who obeyed orders but never spoke, and neither promises, cajoling nor bad language would make the boy let out anything.

No one interfered with his liberty of action, only he could not get the secret of the exit, and the women were all aged with the exception of his charmer, so that he had no temptation to look upon them more than once; he had explored the place from end to end without result, blank and impenetrable walls met him on every side behind the tapestry and marble ornaments, with windows too lofty for him to get at. After he had become Moslem, his fair queen remarked, she would show him how to get out, but until then he was her prisoner

He missed her sometimes from his side when he awoke after sleeping off his heavy night-cap, which he was glad of, but he never could catch her either coming or going, and try as he would to resist temptation, he could not refuse that loving cup which the siren poured out for him nightly. She left him to

attend to matters of state while he slept, and was always waiting for his coming from his bath.

"Turn Mahommedan, while that liquor lasted? Not for George Jackson," he thought to himself. "I'll get out by fair strategy yet, and find where I am then; meantime I must just go on promising to the little demon until that time comes."

Sergeant George Jackson had, in his own heart, a wholesome dread of the little demon, who, as we have seen, was nearly as tall as himself, of a most splendid physique, and with such savage energy even in her love-making, that he did not half care to consider what she might appear like if lashed into a fury of jealousy or rage; she was at present the woman in possession, who environed him with her care and protection, but "God help me," he thought, "if ever I give her cause to round on me."

She was a splendid creature, all tenderness and softness, full of excuses for his shortcomings now that she thought him her own, full of devices for his happiness, and the honouring of him above all other men, proud of her captive in that she was going to lift him out of his low caste, and wipe from him the stains of his race, he seemed more than a husband to her, for he would be her own creature as well. Allah had made a proper man of him it is true, but she would make him into a gentleman and a ruler of India, then he would be no longer a Faringhee.

He wanted to go forth to battle, which was but as she expected; well, she would organise an expedition against some rival tribes afterwards, and let him kill as many as he pleased, but he must not be allowed to peril all her hopes and happiness by going where the

affairs were desperate; she told him how matters were going on with his countrymen, and when he stormed at the chances he was losing, she said:

"Aga Jau, why fight for your promotion, when I can make you great?"

"But that is not the same thing, Baba; don't you see? I shall be branded as a poltroon and a hound, if I don't show up now; besides, I want to be a captain in my own country."

"But you can purchase a captain's post with the money I shall give you, and be ever so much more thought about by your gentlemen friends, than if you had won it with hard service and wounds. Let me show something to my Lord which he will like."

She kissed his frowns away, and touching a spring at one part of the Zenana, she led him through the door which opened, and showed him a secret chamber lined with huge boxes of carved ebony, sandal-work, and ivory, and clamped with solid silver.

"These are all thine, my Lord, when once we have become one in faith as we are already in love. I must yield, so far, to the wishes of my people, but the Hakims of our faith are very indulgent to converts; if you forego other wives, they will grant you the indulgence of permitting you to drink the forbidden wines which my Lord is so fond of — that will suit you, will it not? One wife, and as much of the other as you like?"

"I am content with you, my Beauty, and shall be all my life, of course — for that is the English way — but——"

He began to think about Lucknow, and the

English girl, whose father had been raised from the ranks; this dusky bride was all very well for the present, but for the future, when he could return to England and get married properly—Ah! that was a different matter.

"See, my Lord and love, the portion I shall bring you."

This charming relict of a royal Rajah opened the boxes one after another, and displayed before the dazzled eyes of the soldier mohurs and rupees by the lakh, with cut and uncut stones, besides rare pieces of jewellery, which fairly took away his breath and banished, for the moment, from his thoughts the winsome and saucy features of bonnie Maggie Wilson; his lovely companion smiled as she saw him dive his hands amongst these priceless treasures—feeling that the man who could love such pretty things was her very own, body and soul.

"What can you not purchase with these, Aga Jau?—Respect, position and honours amongst your countrymen. You will take me home to see your Queen with these, and become a great general, without losing one drop of your blood."

"Yes, my lass, I can do all these things with this treasure—and I daresay would be more thought of than if I won it all fighting—but not be able to buy my own respect, or that of my mates. Listen, dear, this is all that a man can wish for on earth, to make him happy, so that he has done his duty as a soldier, when his friends are hard pressed. You are all that a man can wish for, when the trouble is over; but, to have you with this, and the drink galore, while the boys are starving and fighting for

their lives, it ain't right ; and — I must go to the front and take my chance with the others."

" Ah ! you are so brave, so proud, my Lord, you must go and fight. Well, by-and-bye, I'll let you perhaps go—but not just yet—not just yet."

So another few days of enforced dalliance and rich living passed away, and then he was at her again.

" Sweetheart, I must go away and do my share of fighting—I have an old father in Lucknow."

He did not tell her that it was a father-in-law he was thinking about, a prospective father-in-law, named Wilson, he did not consider that necessary.

" Tell me how to find your father — write a letter to your father, who will be mine also, and I will see that he gets it. I will get him out of that place, and we will be happy all together," replied this most persistent bride.

" That won't do, sweetheart," said the Sergeant. " He would never forsake his duty, and he would never pardon me, if I forsook mine — I must go to him."

" Ah, Agar Jau, you are wearied of my love," moaned the poor Ranee, turning from him.

" Not so, my best beloved ; yet think of my duty as a soldier."

He fondled her now, since he wanted to wheedle this favour out of her, as she had done so often before to him for nothing, while she sat oblivious, with her eyes fixed gloomily on the matting. At last she roused herself and kissed him on the brow, sadly and tenderly.

" So be it, Lord of my life. I can resist you no longer, although my heart will break to part with

you — even for a day. To-morrow you shall go to your father in Lucknow—and you will come again?"

"Of course, sweetheart, of course, that is understood. After the fighting is over, I'll come again."

"Then for to-night you are mine, Aga Jau and no father to come between."

"Yours for ever, sweetheart — yours for ever," exclaimed the Sergeant, fervently, as he sank back contented on the cushions, after lighting a fresh cigar, while she poured him out another bumper of sparkling Clicquot.

CHAPTER III.

THE WIDOW'S MESH.

WHEN Major Waters and his companions heard the stentorian rallying cry from the upper hall of the temple, they left the further investigation of the underground chambers for another occasion, and rushed with one accord to the assistance of their leader.

They found the women all placed for safety near the fallen idol, while the men were at the entrance with bayonets fixed, grimly waiting to charge when the enemy advanced again, for they had already driven them back once.

"Major Waters, the enemy are in considerable force out there, and what is worse, seem plentifully supplied with arms, artillery, and ammunition, which we lack at present," said Major Mortimer quietly to the younger man. "We must get some of their stock—do you think you could manage this?"

"I can try, Major Mortimer."

"Right, I will spare you twenty men; there are about a thousand surrounding the temple as far as I can calculate, and they intend to cross the stream, so as to command the main entrance. Stop that plan of theirs and bring back as many of their guns, etc., as you can manage, while we cover your advance."

It was a simple and straightforward order to give, to send twenty men out to a thousand, one man against fifty, the one man armed with only a musket and bayonet, and the fifty with grape, round shot, and bullets, yet Major Waters had no trouble about finding volunteers for the desperate enterprise, for each one man was an Englishman, who considered it only fair to be judged worthy of facing fifty weak-kneed Orientals, even although some of them had been English-trained.

Major Mortimer had certainly been wise in his choice of a position when he fixed upon this temple on the river bank, for in front of the steps leading down from the portico ran a steep declivity to the water's edge, with only a narrow platform on the top, so that the natives, in spite of their numbers, did not have the advantage which they would have had on level ground.

On the other side, however, the bank was also high and steep, so that if they succeeded in placing their guns there they would be able to command a considerable portion of the interior, besides raking the doorway, as the distance between the banks was not more than fifty or sixty yards.

The river at this portion ran deeply, but about a mile to the north there was a shallow fording-place over which the fugitives had come, and it was towards

this ford that a party of the enemy were trailing three large guns with the carts of ammunition.

A very mixed rabble they were and without much order, although several commanders were amongst them on horseback directing their actions; dark-skinned cavalry men these were, who had seen service before, although they made but indifferent officers, as the besieged party saw at a glance.

"Forward!" cried Major Mortimer, as, with another third of his men, he advanced along the platform to the blank side of the temple, charging at the natives who were assembled there, so as to make the way open for Major Waters's party, while the remaining third held the doorway.

It was a sharp tussle which the leaders' division had, while Waters and his men dashed down the hill toward the ford, but the bayonet proved irresistible and forced the natives into the woods, leaving behind them a light field-piece with its waggon of ammunition, which enabled the Major to still further aid those going down, by turning the gun in the direction of the retreating natives, and preventing them from joining those in advance, for this purpose, he planted it on the brow of the hill, forming a square.

Major Waters, with his twenty volunteers, rushed gallantly to the capture of the guns at the foot of the hill, engaging with a British cheer four hundred of the enemy, cleaving through their close ranks like a mowing machine, backwards and forwards, with such rapidity and deadly force that the natives had not time to use their guns, but gave way on every side, flying up the hill, those who could run, to be met by the fire from that field-piece on the top and scattered

Three horses and a couple of bullock-drawn waggons were captured and urged up to the temple by the fifteen men left out of that daring charge ; hard labour it was, with the glowing sun hanging low in the west, and shooting fiery rays into their faces as they pushed and dragged, while the natives gathered around them with savage cries at every dozen yards, and forced them to renew the tactics of the bayonet charge before they could get on again, but at last they reached the plateau, that is twelve wounded heroes out of the twenty, leaving eight of their number along with the many native corpses which they had made.

But the prizes were won and the pluck taken out of the cowardly rabble, who, after a few more attempts to take the British by surprise, went off for fresh reinforcements, leaving them for the time in peace to bury their fallen.

"Now we shall be able to hold this place against five thousand of such curs," exclaimed Major Mortimer, as he examined the store of powder and balls. "That is to say if we can get provisions before we are environed. What sort of exit did you discover, Waters, below ?"

"We did not have time to examine that length, Mortimer, before your call came, but we shall do so first thing to-morrow."

"If the enemy do not find it out and steal in upon us to-night."

"Oh, a couple of men can hold the entrance easily, and with that light field-piece keep the underground stairs clear of anyone stealing up," replied Major Waters, as he resigned himself into the hands of the ladies to have his wound dressed, while the

leader and his followers worked on until darkness fell over them at the preparations of defence.

At sunset the Santal hunters returned with a fairly good bag of game, which, after being cooked and divided, these devoted natives once more left the temple for the forest to look after breakfast, night being the best time for the larger animals; then, the guns were placed in position and the pickets chosen, while those who were not on duty lay down to sleep or talk to their dear ones.

Of Major Waters's twelve supporters each one bore a scar more or less serious; Major Waters had a slight wound, a bullet through the fleshy part of his left arm; this Mrs. Mortimer saw to, and then he lay down and soon after fell asleep.

Lieutenant Green, who of course had followed his mentor into the charge, through his own foolhardiness was pretty severely wounded; indeed, he was one of those unlucky individuals who are constantly getting a cut in action, so that he had been often under nurse's care during that hard journey, and his nurse had always been gentle little Mrs. Finch.

Some of the other men, who had known the fair widow formerly, seeing how affairs were shaping between her and this young green hand, generously left them as much as possible to themselves; besides, since her widowhood she seemed to take a different view of life, had become very reserved with her old friends and avoided them as much as it was possible to do, or at least kept them so well at arm's length that there was no longer the same inducement for them to hover about her; perhaps the little lady was meditating upon turning a new leaf in her book of life.

On this night, after she had almost disrobed herself to furnish bandages for the person of that very reckless young heir to a baronetcy and ten thousand per annum, she sat beside him within the shadow of the fallen monster Kali, gentle, tender-handed and soothing, while he lay languid, but grateful and loving.

He was one of those lanky, lint-haired young men who might spend an evening with one and yet be passed afterwards without recognition, so like was he to a hundred other heirs to peerages and baronetcies; the sort of fellows who spend most of their lives at home hanging about theatrical side-doors or music-hall bars in exquisitely-made dress clothes and fashionable capes; young fellows with no vices about them, at least not enough to damn them, who wait, like the small biscuit and diamond-shaped pieces of cheese at the said bars, to be picked up and nibbled by those who are that way disposed, harmless victims, in England, who are best served when their parents send them out to active service.

He looked a fool, and didn't at all mind being treated as one by his brother officers, and yet his very good nature made them all like him, in spite of their chaff and practical jokes upon him; amongst his friends no one could ruffle the temper of young Green.

During this march, however, he had endeared himself to them all still more, for in the hour of trial no one displayed more cheerful endurance, while in the fight they were forced to look after him, he was so utterly regardless of the first principles of warfare;—the art of guard.

He spread himself out for the cut that was sure to

come early in the engagement, then, with a shrill yell and a flood of tears—for he wept copiously at such times—he would rush forward blindly and demolish his enemy, regardless of all they might do to him ; at the first, those who were with him were inclined to laugh derisively at those womanly tokens of weakness, but after a time they learnt to respect the shower which sprang from his unsophisticated eyes, for every drop meant the heart's blood of an enemy. He was a young man without self-control, but, like Sammy Tompkins, he was absolutely fearless.

Mrs. Finch had witnessed his heroic deeds, and knew about his future prospects in life, also, although she did not own it and no one would have suspected it ; she was ten years his senior, and, to a woman with a career, the fresh attentions of a boy are wonderfully attractive ; sometimes mercenary thoughts are completely forgotten, and the awkward boy finds his way into the jaded heart where the most fascinating of men might knock in vain.

He had fought bravely that afternoon, and, wonderful to relate, she was not acting a part on this night while she sat beside him.

She had known crowds of handsome, witty and amusing men, who were ready to lavish their money and presents upon her without an after-thought, but since the loss of her savings in the Delhi Bank these things had grown to be like Dead Sea fruit in her estimation, at least for the present; the future prospects of the young man had indeed interested her in him at first, for she was not one of those who could accept a life of privation or discomfort for honour's sake, yet she had begun to think that it was possible to

become in reality what she had feigned so well for so long, if this chance could only be secured.

The deep shadow of the temple of Kali enveloped them, so that they could not see each other, while through the open doorway poured the silent moonlight, falling in a broad patch upon the floor, and over which the busy night spiders were sliding along their gossamer threads, making foolish meshes which would presently be swept aside by the pickets when the men were changed; she watched these futile insect-traps with a chastened melancholy, wondering if her present mesh would be as roughly swept aside before she had time to secure her victim—for he seemed a victim—this unsophisticated boy whom she was spinning so patiently for.

There were angels hovering about on this sultry night, touching the woman's heart, and tempting her almost beyond her strength to do a foolish thing and confess to this young man her past, even though, by doing so, she lost him and all her hopes.

"Mrs. Finch—Eugenie, what a good sort you are, to be sure," murmured the stricken youth, as he caught her soft hand and held it in his.

"Hush, you foolish boy, I am nothing of the sort. I am a very bad woman if you knew all."

She could have bitten out her tongue for these words, which it had forced from her, and she hastened to add playfully:

"All women are more or less bad, do you know, Charley; it is only the men who think us angels. Now, then, go to sleep like a good boy, and don't mind me."

"I don't feel like to sleep just now, and if you

don't mind, I'd like to say something to you—that is, if you don't really mind, you know."

"Say what you please, Charley, I will listen, for I am not much inclined yet for sleep," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

"And you won't be angry and laugh at me for a stupid—as of course I am?"

"No, Charley, no! I promise you I won't be angry, no matter what you tell me."

"I never met any woman so good, so kind-hearted, or so beautiful as you are, Eugenie, and I have known lots of them of all sorts, I'm sorry to say. In fact, I have knocked about a good deal when at home, and been altogether a bad card in my day."

"Ah!" Eugenie was beginning to feel relieved in her mind, and the uncomfortable angels were drawing back.

Charley Green heard that deep sigh of relief, and naturally put it down to disappointment; therefore, began unconsciously to imitate her former tactics and excuse himself.

"What I mean is, of course, Eugenie, I was no worse than a hundred other fellows who weren't stinted in their expenditure; did a bit on the turf and at the tables, got the *entrée* to theatre and music-hall back places, and—and all that sort of thing, you know."

"I don't know, of course, Charley, but I can guess for I am a widow now."

"Exactly; that's what I'm trying to come to. You don't expect a fellow to be altogether a saint; it's better to have sown my wild oats, isn't it?"

"Much better, if the soil has been a stony one on

which they were sown, for then you don't expect much of a harvest," observed the widow softly, loving madly in her heart of hearts this young man for his candour, and now determined to evade any return of confidence. The good angels had all passed, excepting one, through the moonlit doorway, and without disturbing the spiders' webs.

That solitary good angel laid his hand upon her heart and warmed it without hurting the organ on which it pressed. The name of this lingering angel was "Good Resolution," the others who had passed were Remorse, Repentance, and Humility — good spirits, but most uncomfortable marplots.

"Ah, that is all right, Eugenie. I did wrong sometimes to myself, but I never wronged any woman, or else I would not have spoken so much to you."

"And I never wronged any man very much, or else I couldn't have listened to so much from *you*," thought the widow, but she said aloud:

"I believe you, Charley; but what else did you want to say to me?"

"Only this, and pray pardon my abruptness, but will you marry me when we get back to civilization? for I love you more than I can put into words."

"Charley, my late husband is just two months dead——"

"But, dear Eugenie, the circumstances are exceptional. Think of your children, if not of yourself."

"And you are willing to be burdened with these—encumbrances?"

"Rather—why, I love them as if they were my own already," returned this infatuated but daring wooer.

"But you have not asked me to give an account of my particular sins?"

"No, and I don't want to hear them."

"But others, envious people, you know, Charlie, possible rivals, may try to poison your ears against me."

"Let them try if they dare. Promise to become my wife, and I will protect your good name; besides, no matter what they said about you, you are good enough for me, and if you can forgive my past, why should I cavil about yours?"

"Is that a bargain, Charley, oblivion for oblivion?"

"Yes, Eugenie, with all my heart."

She stooped over him and kissed him fondly on that part of his forehead which the bandage did not cover.

"Then let this compact stand. I promise to be your wife when you ask me, and I hope that you will never regret your bargain."

"Kiss me again, darling, and I shall sleep content."

Their lips met this time, and then, like a gratified child who has got his toy, he fell asleep.

It was about this time that the pickets were changed, and Sammy, followed by the bloodhound Hector and the Afghans, left the temple on their scouting expedition to Cawnpore. Major Waters was in command of the fresh picket, while Major Mortimer went in to take his well-earned sleep, leaving his junior on the platform.

Major Waters was standing leaning on his sword, looking after the retreating scouts, on whose return so much depended, his tall, handsome figure thrown out in bold relief by the midnight moon, and his classical features pale and interesting, when he heard

his name uttered softly, and on looking round saw his little friend Mrs. Finch in the doorway.

"Ah, Eugenie, come to share my lonely vigil this hot night? Better get indoors, my dear, in case a stray shot reaches you."

"Bertram, I want to speak to you, my friend."

"Then come out here, for I cannot leave my post."

She had wrapped round her shoulders a piece of cotton, one of the slaughtered enemy's robes which the soldiers had prudently stripped off for the sake of the ladies' scanty wardrobes; with this covering on her like a bath towel, she advanced until she stood beside him.

"Well, what is it, dear?"

She looked at him for a moment fixedly with that dove-like glance of hers, and then said:

"I have promised to-night to marry your friend Green."

Major Waters whistled his astonishment and answered, "You haven't let the grass grow, Eugenie, but all the same let me congratulate you and—my friend Green."

Another glance, this time of sweet entreaty. "Bertram, you do not mind, you will not object? It is for the sake of my children."

"My sweet girl, I am delighted with this arrangement, we shall be better friends than ever; not a friend of yours but will rejoice over your good luck, and as for myself, I'll come and live with you and my friend Green when you are married."

"Yes, Bertram, we shall both be glad to have you as—as——"

"Yes, Eugenie?"

"The brother-at-arms of my husband, and my brother."

"Eugenie!"

"Bertram, I have a chance now which I never had before, a chance for myself and my children, and I want to banish the past and live for the one who gives me this chance—you understand, Bertram?"

Major Waters looked into her eyes with a scrutinizing glance, and then he bent his head down to her hand and kissed it gravely.

"I understand you, my friend, as I think every one who has known you will also; go inside and sleep in peace. Good night, my dear Mrs. Finch."

"Good night, Bertram."

They shook hands, after which she glided inside, and he resumed his watch thoughtfully.

"By Jove, I didn't think that Green would quite go that length; and yet why not? she's worth twenty of him as far as brains are concerned, and no one has shown up better in the hour of trial.

"I suppose it would be considered in some quarters my duty to open his eyes to what he is getting, and be called out for my interference, and yet why should I? beyond fleecing me pretty considerably, she has never injured me, why should I spoil her chance? seeing she is no worse than a hundred others and a great deal nicer than most of her sex.

"If Green don't get her, he will most likely fall into the clutches of some ballet-girl, and that would be ten thousand degrees worse, for he is just the fellow to do that sort of thing, and I really do believe she has changed towards me and given her heart up to him, impossible almost as it seems to believe it, but

then there's no accounting for the queer tastes of women.

"Well, well, she wants to run straight now, that's clear, and I am not going to be the one to spoil her good intentions, so then, Eugenie, my dear, the past is dead, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum.*"

A bullet from the opposite side of the bank, fanning his cheek and flattening itself against the side of the temple, roused him from his cogitations.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST REPULSE.

ALL went merry at Bithúr for the next ten days after the fall of Cawnpore, while the troops of Nana Sahib skirmished the country round about, waiting upon their lord rousing himself up to lead them on to further victories; and the captive women, now nearly two hundred, lay sweltering within that close brick building, to which they had been taken, with other captives brought in from different parts.

The terrible sufferings of these English ladies will never be known, but as the result showed they were faithful to their creed, their friends and their honour to the last; mayhap one or two yielded under the terrorism of their conquerors and entered the zenanas, if so their record is lost, they may still be alive or their children, but the privacy of the Mahommedan's household is respected throughout India, and there has been no supervision, which perhaps is as well for the victims, if any, who yielded to purchase life on such conditions.

Nana, in his own security, gave no other orders

respecting these poor captives, except relinquishment of their rights as Englishwomen or else ruthless slaughter. He left the carrying out of these orders to those most interested in it; he was not interested in the slightest degree, so the poor captives suffered the tortures of the damned from heat, thirst, lack of food, and shameful insults, and prayed for the death to come which walked so tardily.

Nana lingered on amongst his amusements and religious exercises, under the impression that the holy war was over, holding his court daily, and receiving the reports of his generals, and promising presently to bestir himself and visit his allies, the Begum of Oudh and the King of Delhi, but, as he lazily observed, there was no hurry for the present, the Feringhee were swept into the sea, and terrified out of India.

But one day early in July the fiery Maulavi roused him from his Oriental apathy by informing him that the Feringhee avengers had reached Allahabad and were coming on in hot haste towards Cawnpore; then the Peshwa called for his war elephant with his body-guard, and after marshalling his army, marched away with blaring trumpets to meet the foe.

The army which marched out of Bithúr was over five thousand strong, but there were other forces in advance under the command of Tantia Topí, Bala Sahib, Rao Sahib and the other generals, who met the British at different points of their march and engaged with them fiercely; at Futtehpore they were broken and driven back after ten minutes' savage fighting at close quarters, at Aong another battle took place, where the natives were again driven back

by the resistless force of avengers; then came the taking of the bridge at Pandoo Nuddee, which the Highlanders took at a run, slaughtering their opponents wholesale.

Bala Sahib, Nana's brother, gallopped back after this defeat and met the Peshwa and his army, the road being lined with panic-stricken natives rushing for their lives.

"What now?" cried Nana, when he saw his brother.

"We are beaten so far, my lord."

"Ah! and the prisoners at Cawnpore, do they still hold out also?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Ride there, my brother, and order their immediate sacrifice. We must teach these Faringhees a wholesome lesson and appease the wrath of Siva."

Bala Sahib rode off to fulfil this inhuman commission, while the Peshwa called out: "Onwards, my brave soldiers, we shall stop this little army of dogs."

Tantia Topí, who had joined his master, directed his movements at this point with the skill and acumen of a born general. They pushed on and fixed upon Aherwa, seven miles from Cawnpore, for the final stand, a position so strong that with their overwhelming force victory seemed certain; for this portion of the army were fresh, with a night's good rest and easy marches, while the British, one thousand two hundred strong, worn out with forced marches, cholera, fever, and the awful heat, as well as want of nourishment, were opposed to seven thousand rested natives of the soil, with their position fixed upon and protected by five fortified villages.

But the army of Nana had still to learn the fierce

energy which revenge gives to England's sons, how a word can banish fatigue from the frames of the "petticoated devils," and how the honourable rivalry of war will brace up the hearts of the weakest Englishman. This lesson, the first of a long series, was coming upon the high-caste and royal, languid priest of Brahma.

The sun rose up on this eventful morning of midsummer with such arid intensity that even the Indians felt uncomfortable as they swarmed, exposed to its unclouded rays.

What an appropriate sun that was on this day when men's passions were to be roused up to the fiercest tension, so that no fire of Nature could touch them! When the Indian sun of midsummer darts on the nape of the purposeless pedestrian's neck, he falls as from a stroke of lightning; but when war flames up his blood, then it is fire meeting fire, and Nature holds back her deadly strokes. No Englishman cool blooded would have attempted to walk out under that scorching flame, yet one thousand two hundred men rushed at full charge against the murderers of their countrywomen and children, and did not notice its intensity at the time; and, what was more wonderful, it spared them to do their work of vengeance.

This was in reality the Waterloo of Nana Sahib, and he felt it to be so as he saw his followers rush back from the advance of the British, leaving everything behind them in their panic, and dispiriting the main body, as yet untried.

He therefore appealed to their very fears in his desperation, telling them that they might as well win heaven by standing to their arms and dying with

their faces to the foe, for there could be no hope of pardon now. The natives heard him and prepared to make a last stand.

He placed his forces and guns (twenty-four pounders and field-pieces) in the most favourable positions. "His left wing rested on an entrenched village standing amongst trees on high ground, within a mile of the Ganges, and was defended by three twenty-four-pounders. His centre was covered by swampy ground and by a low-lying hamlet, on the edge of which, commanding the trunk road, were a twenty-four-pound howitzer and a nine-pounder, covered by mud earthworks. His right was covered by a village in a mango grove, surrounded by a mud wall, through the embrasures of which two nine-pounders pointed their muzzles towards the fort." *

Tantia Topí laid his plans carefully, so that he might meet the English as they advanced towards the forts with a concentrated fire which would annihilate them; but he was betrayed by two sepoys, who carried the information of his plans to the British and so saved them.

General Havelock ordered Barrow to move on with a company of the Madras Fusiliers in skirmishing order, so as to hoodwink the natives, while he took the body of his small army round by the grove to the right; when that cover failed he charged the enemy with the bayonet.

Nana Sahib could not see this, for he was kept in the background under the brow of the hill, but very soon he saw the result, and became frantic.

In deadly silence, without firing a shot, the 78th

* From "The Indian Mutiny," by Colonel G. E Mallison, C.S.I.

Highlanders dashed forward, the sweat running over their faces and their kilts blown out; over the mound and into the village they raced without a sound, taking the guns in a few minutes and sending the left flank backwards in broken confusion.

The centre turned their howitzer against the victorious Highlanders, upon which, headed by Havelock, they charged again, this time with a savage cheer, and the howitzer was silenced, while the centre was smashed up as completely as the left had been.

Meanwhile the 64th and 84th with the Sikhs and volunteers, led on by Barrow, forced the right flank of the enemy to a strongly-fortified village about a mile in the rear. Here they assembled again, when Havelock shouted:

"Who is to take that village, the Highlanders or the 64th?"

Immediately the two panting regiments raced with their fixed bayonets under those blistering rays, and carried it without a pause, slaughtering wholesale.

The native army was demolished so far, and the British in sore need of a rest, for hardly a man could stagger up the hill before them, over which the defeated had fled; but Havelock was inexorable. Hardly was the village stormed, than once more he formed his line, and with encouraging words led them up the hill at a run.

Nana, half-a-mile behind the hill, saw his troops flying before him disorganised, and at once ordered his trumpets and drums to play, while he rode amongst the faint-hearted natives on his elephant and exhorted them to make one more stand for India and their religion. Meanwhile his gunners were busy with his

last howitzer and field-pieces, so that when the wearied English soldiers reached the summit they were greeted with a fierce discharge of artillery—the battle wasn't yet won.

"Who is that on the pony riding in front of the Faringhees?" panted Nana, hoarse with his appeals to his troops.

"General Havelock, sire," answered Tantia Topí.

"Shoot him down, and we shall beat them yet."

A hundred muskets responded to his order, but without result; they could hear Havelock's shrill voice addressing his worn-out men, but the best marksman missed that historic leader, who galloped between the two forces.

The gunners were sending their grape and round-shot with deadly effect into those wearied ranks, who were without guns, but they did not pause; with another spurt they cleared that half-mile of space, leaving their dead and wounded behind them as they were mowed down by the withering fire: on they charged without a word, while Nana watched them with a sinking heart; then with a yell the avengers were glutting themselves with the blood of hundreds, while the lost Peshwa turned his back and fled to Bithúr with the remnant of his demoralized army, while the conquerors lay down and won their well-earned rest among the trophies and bodies of the defeated.

Havelock and his force of less than one thousand one hundred men lay down that night on the blood-drenched ground seven miles from Cawnpore, supperless and like logs. Next morning, without breaking their fast, they entered the city, which they found evacuated, with the magazine blown up, and there

they saw the poor victims who had been offered so vainly up to Siva, the women and children massacred so hurriedly, so ruthlessly, and pitched like carrion down that well.

Then when they saw this the men howled, wept, gnashed their teeth, and required no more urging to go on; the doom of the high-priest Peshwa was sealed.

CHAPTER V.

WITH SIR HENRY HAVELOCK.

"I SHOULD know the face of that sleeping man if it wasn't for his strange clothes," said Captain Barney McKay of the 78th Highlanders, as he bent over the figure which the natives had abandoned after their repulse.

"May I be jiggered if this ain't Sergeant Jackson turned up again, after we had all given him up, dressed like a field officer and looking as if he had been feeding for a show during the past month, while we were starving and mourning over him. Oh, dash my buttons! but he is mortally drunk at this blessed moment! Just you smell his breath, sir; why it's like the open door of a swell pub."

Sammy Tompkins was the last speaker, and the scene was about half-a-mile from the temple which he and his companions had left the midnight before, for it was now sunrise.

Sammy Tompkins, with an advance company of the Cawnpore victors, who had met him on the road during the night and turned back with him to bring on their countrymen to where the General was encamped, a few miles to the rear.

The object which they had paused to look at was a palankeen, within which rested the unconscious but carefully-dressed form of that gallant hero, George Jackson, still under the influence of the siren's final draught.

The escort who were carrying him along had been promptly dispersed by this band of scouts, while the palankeen, with its precious contents, was captured and examined.

"It is Jackson, but how the devil does he come to be travelling in this state?" said Barney. "Och, sure, but we'll know in another minute, for he's coming to himself."

"I'll wake him up, sir, if so be that you don't tell on me," replied Sammy, raising the helpless arm and pinching it with all his might. "I told you so; that'll wake up the selfish pig." And the boy added a vicious kick to the pinch, which with the fresh air seemed to revive the sleeper, for he opened his eyes and yawned.

"Hallo! where am I?"

"With friends, I hope, if you can give an explanation of your absence and present costume," replied the Captain gravely.

Sergeant Jackson sprang to his feet and gazed vacantly about him for a moment.

"This is not the underground palace!"

"Not exactly, Sergeant—or have we to say Major?—Jackson."

"Then she has kept her word and let me out. Boys, I have been a prisoner for the past month, God knows where, for I don't."

"You seem to have had a good time of it, sir," observed the Captain, bitterly.

"Yes, as far as grub and drink goes, I have. A woman took me, a queen of somewhere got me into her clutches with some damned witchcraft, and kept me from my duty; but tell me, am I back in time to take my hand at fighting?"

"Oh, yes, Sergeant Jackson, there is plenty of fighting yet to be done, if that's your taste."

"Thank God! And my friends—where are they?"

"We are going to them now. Fall in, boys, and give General Jackson a musket, for we seem to be wanted in front."

There was, indeed, all the sounds of a brisk engagement going on in the direction of the temple, the thunder of guns and the rattle of musketry, so closing in at the word, the soldiers trotted off at double-quick.

The firing had been going on at intervals for some time, and as they were on the other side of the stream, now considerably swollen with the late rains, it was not long before they reached the outer rim of trees which had hitherto hidden the combatants from their eyes. Then they paused for a moment to collect their energies and prepare for the charge which had proved so effectual in the other engagements.

They were on a higher standpoint than the river banks, so that the scene spread like a panorama before them—the temple in which the besieged were confined, while around them swarmed from bank to bank over one thousand insurgents. On the other side had been flung up a hasty battery, on which a large gun was pouring shot into the front door and walls of the temple with a steady persistency which threatened to demolish it very soon, with its barricades.

There were not more than three hundred of the enemy on this side of the river, their intention being merely to drive out the besieged, while the main force on the other side waited to receive them.

Inside, Major Mortimer's party were firing at intervals through the narrow loopholes with their muskets only. Sammy, as he watched, wondered why the bigger guns were silent; then, all at once, he guessed, and said to the Captain:

"Sir, I'm thinking you'll be seeing some of our party flanking them rebels presently from the jungle, they have discovered a back way under the ground."

"Just so, youngster, I think you may be right, but we must bayonet these fellows at the gun meanwhile, or the temple will be coming down by the run. Forward, lads, you've only got about twenty to one against you this time, and that's nothing after the past few days' work.

Down the hill they rushed in perfect silence, covering the hundred yards between them and the bank in a few seconds of time, so that the astonished natives had hardly time to look round, at the sound of the trampling feet, before the gunners were bayonetted, and a third of the rest driven headlong into the roaring stream.

Then the twenty-five men divided, and relentlessly charged to right and left, sparing none that they could get at, but drilling straight through the masses to the other side and back again, making their arms work as if they were harvest men forking hay into a shed before a coming storm. In five minutes the ground was covered with that human harvest, without the loss of a white man

while scores of natives were struggling madly in the torrent below.

Hector did his own share in the assault, but his fangs were not equal to the three-edged fluted weapons in the matter of dispatch. Still, during that five minutes, he accounted for two of the enemy without getting a scratch. As far as the British were concerned it was a bloodless and complete victory, as well as a total slaughter, for those who had rushed beyond reach of the bayonet were brought down, like birds on the wing, with the bullets.

Not a second was lost after this contingent of the enemy were dispatched, for they at once faced the muzzle of the captured gun to the masses about the temple, and sent shot after shot amongst them, until the guns became almost red-hot, while the space about them grew dense with the smoke blown from its mouth, so that those on the other side could not see the change of gunners, and must have thought that their friends had gone mad.

"Five men are enough to work this gun," shouted the Captain. "Boy, lead us to the ford, where we can cross over and settle the game."

Under cover of the smoke they rushed down the hill, and crossing the ford with many a slip and stumble, for the water rolled over the sands and stones at a furious rate, they caught the natives now flying down like frightened sheep, and bowled them over, while the gun played on those above in a most devastating style.

All at once another fire opened from the jungle beyond, on the astonished natives, and scattered them to right and left.

Then, with a ringing shout, the three English parties met, Major Waters with his followers from the jungle, to which he had discovered a passage through the vaults; Major Mortimer with his, from the smashed-in door of the temple; while Captain Barney McKay, with his fiery and ruthless Highlanders, dashed from the river. The big guns ceased firing at the sound of that wild cheer, for those who worked it knew that the brunt of the battle was over. Then the white smoke slowly floated upwards like thin mist to that fiery morning sun, while the soldiers peered about them for fresh victims.

Away to the north of the temple the remnants of that thousand dusky-hued army were rushing helter-skelter to reach the forest before they could be seen, barely four hundred strong, while over six hundred lay headless, mutilated, and pierced through on the ground, or were rolling like boulders amongst the foaming yellow flood between the cliffs.

In a second the half-cooled gun from the opposite bank was twisted about, and a murderous fire of grape poured into their flying close ranks, making great gaps through them, so that scarcely a hundred reached the shelter of the trees above, hardly fifty unwounded.

The victory was complete, but those fierce twenty Highlanders were not half satisfied with the slaughter, nor would they be while one native was left alive, for the atrocities of Cawnpore were still too fresh in their minds; so no sooner did they see this remnant escaping than, with a fierce yell, they sprang after their impetuous half Irish leader, who shouted back as he passed Major Mortimer:

"See you presently, dear boy. Don't leave one of the devils alive who murdered all our women and children at Cawnpore."

His parting words flamed up the passion of the Delhi survivors, and, while some followed him, the others scattered out, and with their bayonets and swords despatched the wounded who were trying to limp away, after which they stood on the banks of the river, and potted each man who came to the surface alive.

Sergeant Jackson ran along with Captain McKay, and, while cursing the awful heat and the extra flesh he had put on during the past month of pleasure, did his part in the exterminating of these flying rebels.

Half an hour afterwards they were all assembled in the temple, giving and hearing the tidings of the disasters, while the meagre breakfast was being prepared, before the march back to camp began. Havelock was on the banks of the Ganges, not six miles distant; and they must hasten, for he might shift his quarters any moment; however, a swift-footed Afghan had started off with news of the victory and the approach of the fugitives.

"Ah, Mrs. Finch, me darling, and there you are at last," observed Captain McKay, as he wiped the heavy drops from his brow and approached the fair one. "Sure, and I didn't think to meet you this side of kingdom come. How long is it since we parted?"

"Don't ask me embarrassing questions, Captain Barney, it was in Calcutta where we saw each other last."

"Just after you had blessed Mr. Finch, and that

reminds me, where is the good man?—Ah, I beg your pardon, my dear."

He comprehended her glance towards the two girls, and said softly:

"Just so, my dear, and who amongst us cannot tell the same story about these murdering devils? My sword hasn't a quarter quenched its thirst yet, for after all, what is a thousand or two when we consider what we have lost."

Then he went on to tell with graphic detail the gory sight that had met them in the prison-house of Cawnpore, told it with the tears running over his sun-tanned cheeks, while his kilted heroes howled with unglutted rage, and a wail of horror and pity rang through the temple.

"Little frocks and shoes, ladies, floating amongst that three-inch lake of blood; bonnets, collars, combs and tresses of hair, gentlemen, that's all we found at first of the two hundred defenceless ones we had come to save, that and the sword-cuts on the pillars, with the bullet marks on the walls not three feet from the floor, to tell us how the bloody fiends had massacred crouching women and children, and then—and then; the well where we discovered the mutilated bodies——Ah there, ah there, boys, I'll never spare an Indian till the day of my death, and glory be to God, but General Neil is doing his duty like a man just now at Cawnpore, more power to his elbow, for I only wish I was helping him to press their noses amongst the blood they have spilt, and afterwards blow them to smithereens from the cannon's mouth. I have done a trifle, however, this morning in the good cause, but not enough—not near enough."

The captain did not say much about the hunger and thirst Havelock's army had suffered during those forced marches, or the supernatural exertions they had gone through, before Cawnpore was reached, possibly it all counted in his eyes as the day's service to the Queen; he had risen from the ranks to his present position, and a man didn't rise in those days without doing exceptional work for his promotion, while he loved fighting as only an Irish-Scotsman can, having the blood of two warlike nations in his veins; but when he saw the tears and heard the groans which his recital caused, with a ready wit he turned the conversation into more pleasant channels.

"Bedad, ladies and gentlemen, while we have all been fasting and fighting for Old England, there is one here—and a good soldier he is for all the fat he has gathered about him—as he has proved to-day, who has been having a deal more than cheese and bread this past month. Here, Jackson, tell the company your adventures in prison, and for the sake of the ladies touch lightly about the Begum part of it, for they mightn't see it in the same delicate way that we men folks take it; speak out, you lucky young Adonis, and help them to forget my melancholy facts with your agreeable fiction."

"It's hardly fiction, as I am here to prove," replied Jackson, as he took the platform and related his adventures, touching very lightly and delicately indeed about the "*Begum part of it*," as Captain Barney had advised; yet he made out his case clear enough to be acquitted of selfishness, on the score of his good looks by the ladies and because of his return and undoubted acts of prowess on that day by the

gentlemen. Indeed before he had finished his modest narrative, many of those present wondered how he ever could have left such a pleasant heaven for such an unsettled portion of earth.

"Bedad, but I couldn't have left the dear creature," quoth Captain Barney, "and he deserves his promotion for that alone, don't you think so, Major Mortimer?"

"I do, Barney my boy, and I'll see that this great sacrifice is represented at head-quarters, and if we cannot get him the right to wear the coat he has on at present, or at least one a shade under at first," replied the jovial leader, who had not too much dignity.

"It's to be hoped that Miss Maggie Wilson, of Lucknow, don't hear about this month's imprisonment," daringly shouted the irrepressible Sammy Tompkins, as he ducked from the fist that was shot out in his direction by the irate sergeant.

"You young dog, if ever you mention it I'll flay you alive."

A general laugh answered this retort from the company, as they rose and wiped the tears from their eyes, so quickly the one phase of emotion follows on the other where crowds are together.

An hour more and they were on the march, about eighty women and children and two hundred and odd men.

The river passage was got over safely, with the acquired baggage of ammunition and sundries with the guns, the men carrying the women and children over in their arms; and then the rest of the journey was safely accomplished, for the way thus far was open

and clear; by sunset they were ushered into the half-famished camp of the great leader and welcomed with hearty cheers.

They all looked at General Sir Henry Havelock with interest; the somewhat narrow-faced, but intensely religious, soldier who went to battle with prayers on his lips and his Bible in his pocket; an enthusiast he was, who believed in his mission as avenger, as devoutly as the Brahmin Nana did, yet had more genius, and so discarded all accepted rules of war, and in consequence won where a martinet would have failed.

But Sir James Outram, the club-nosed, homely-visaged man, with his shock of beard and hair, and rather sullen expression, impressed some of them even more than this flashing-eyed Havelock, for he was the only man in the British Army who had ever been known to waive his right as superior officer, when there was the chance of gaining "kudos," and who could be content to serve as a volunteer on this vast occasion. The women worshipped Havelock, the justly recognised hero, but the men regarded this modern Bayard with reverential wonder, as most men can understand these sacrifices, though to some women they may pass unnoticed.

Sir Henry Havelock, under exceptional difficulties, had managed to land his forces on this part of the country from the other side of the Ganges, now over a mile in breadth. It had taken him a week to accomplish the difficult feat, so he was glad to receive this reinforcement of men, for he was about to advance upon Onao, where the natives were gathered in great strength; all his heart was with the

beleaguered Lucknow, and this was a step on the way.

Next morning the women and children were sent on to General Neil at Cawnpore under a sufficient escort, while the able-bodied men pushed on, almost desperate, for they were debilitated with sickness and short provisions, and sadly disappointed that the promised reinforcements had not arrived, as Sir Henry said, "If the worst comes to the worst we can but die with our swords in our hands."

Havelock took Onao after a desperate fight, and then pushed on to Busserat Gunge, which after another severe and heroic but protracted struggle they won, driving out the enemy from this walled and strongly fortified town.

Yet in spite of all his efforts he could not advance towards Lucknow, sickness and want were demoralizing his forces, so that most unwillingly he retreated to Mungulwar, where being joined by two hundred and fifty seven men with four more guns, he again pushed on to Busserat Gunge, and won it a second time with heavy loss; between him and Lucknow lay over thirty thousand of the enemy, while he had only one thousand men to command.

Lucknow for the present had to be given up, for the news came that Nana Sahib had established himself strongly at Bithúr, and that the natives were clustering there under his banners; so once again the skeleton remnant of this worn out army turned back, after another desperate battle at Busserat Gunge, re-crossed the Ganges, and, joining Neil at Cawnpore, marched without resting on to the rebel stronghold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALL OF BITHÚR.

NANA SAHIB was a fatalist. The force under him outnumbered the British five to one at least, having proper rest and nourishment with plenty of ammunition and guns, whereas the Faringhee were exhausted with six weeks of incessant fighting and marching, yet he had seen these lions fight and his jackals fly before them, and a superstitious horror was in him for this new General, who was like himself a preacher, and who bore a charmed life.

He had lost heart in his people, and even while preparing for battle likewise placed his zenana ready for flight, and this prudent precaution in any man on the eve of a momentous battle is fatal to his prospects of winning, for a critical battle, like heavy gambling, admits of no hedging.

On this decisive day of his fate, the hottest of that extra hot season, Nana paced his audience chamber with gloomy brow and restless feet, paying but small attention to his generals, who stood near at hand waiting for him to open the council.

He had offered up his sacrifice of blood to Siva and Kali without avail, for the Faringhee were marching on, and like a plague spot were consuming his vast hosts; he had defiled himself for nothing, rendered his offerings of rice and flowers abortive, risked his fortune upon the losing side, and with his all in this world, many of his prospects in the next.

For these crimes, which before they were perpe-

trated, seemed so necessary to his country and cause, but now they were past, appeared to be of such trifling importance when weighed with the odium and risks he had brought upon himself and his followers; in fact it was being driven more harshly into his soul every hour that the Hindoo would never be master; he thought about the small company who had kept his hordes at bay so long, and upon this reduced number who were marching against him with such indomitable determination and relentless fury, and his heart sunk with dismay as he rolled his heavy eyes round the marble walls of that beautiful palace, and groaned in his hopeless misery.

"Courage, my noble Lord," said Tantia Topí, "we are six to one of them here, with a splendid position, and twelve times their quantity of armament, while the gods watch over us."

"I have offended the gods, Tantia Behadur. We were ten to one of them at Cawnpore."

"And we defeated them."

"Because of their women and children only they yielded to us; we could never have subdued the men."

"Tush, my Lord, our men must fight now, for this Havelock will show no mercy to his prisoners; give me your blessing, and let me go forth with good hopes, for when I come again it will be to tell you of our victory," replied Tantia, stooping before his master.

Nana raised his hands over his faithful lieutenant, and muttered the desired blessing in a husky voice, after which that redoubtable warrior strode out with his armour clanking loudly.

"Are the boats all ready, Azim-Ullah Behadur?"

"Yes, my Lord," replied Azim, as he also with the others prepared to leave the hall. "Go, my children, and do your best on this day for the sake of India, and may the gods watch over you. I will wait here on the result. Bala, my brother."

"Yes, my Lord."

"Bring me the tidings if it be defeat, and we will fly together, but let another come with news of victory. I shall pass the time in prayer until you come."

Bala bent his head, and with his nephew Rao went out quickly, leaving the master alone with his dejected and trembling slaves, who eyed him gloomily, as he stood in the centre of that hall with bent head and downcast lids.

Outside, the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky with vertical rays of fierce intensity on the deserted courts and gardens, for every man who could carry a musket had gone with the army to the sugar plantations and villages on the other side of the stream to check the advance of the British.

Only in the outside court of the zenana portion was there any show of life; here the palankeens and bearers waited, with the gorgeously caparisoned elephants and their mahouts, like the gloomy master inside, on the result, for already the household and the treasures were within the splendid howdahs and palenkeens, crouching in horror as they listened for the order to move to the boats and rafts.

One silent hour of awful suspense and silence reigned over that beautiful but doomed palace, while the Peshwa performed his religious exercises, and then the walls were shaken by the near thunder of the cannon from the insurgents amongst the trees

and cane fields, and the avengers on the plain, and as the first report reached his ears, the ex-Prince of Bithúr stopped in the middle of his prayer and rushed out to the balcony, where he waited, clutching to the railing, and in his nervous tension crushing and tearing the creeping flowers that covered it, while his dark eyes became charged with blood as he glared in the direction of the battle.

The volumes of smoke rising from the trees and plantations were all that could be seen of the work of slaughter; this and the thunderous explosions which made the marble vibrate under the feet of that wretched master, who waited alone, as the mystic Jasim had predicted he would, his soul faint with a thousand surmises and reflections, and his brain burning beneath the royal turban.

He gasped a hurried prayer to Siva and implored that bloody demon to turn his wrath upon the Faringhees and away from his worshippers; he reminded this unseen spirit how he had sacrificed to him the women and children of Cawnpore and elsewhere, how he had broken the laws of Nature to propitiate him and *her* who recognised no obligations and no ties.

He could not pray to the other deities at this moment, for they were beneficent gods, who were satisfied with offerings of flowers and fruit, but they did not interest themselves in slaughter; besides, he was at present too contaminated with crime to be heard by them; only Siva and Kali could hear him now, the married pair of blood and devastation.

"Oh, great Siva! oh, divine Kali! fight with us now, and drink your fill of the blood of the usurpers! but

pass over my people for the sacrifices I have already made and the victims whom I shall offer up if victory is mine! Oh, great Siva! oh, divine Kali! forgive me that my caste forbids me to use the knife myself or look upon the blood which I have caused to flow in your service, and forsake me not in this momentous hour, for already have I sacrificed a thousand years that you may be satisfied and that your hearts may be merry with the wine you love. Great Siva! divine Kali! fight for me and mine!"

So this high priest of fruit, grain and flowers raved, with the blood-stained froth gathering upon his inky beard, while his quivering nostrils sniffed in the sulphur of those white clouds, and his deafened ears were stunned with that awful thunder.

No spectres of his victims crossed his distorted vision during this sunlit vigil, for he had not seen them with his eyes, and a murderer who orders the deed cannot carry or build up the picture as the executioners can who have beheld the details. The hangman may, in his nervous moments, see the last despairing expression of his justly-doomed victim's face; the judge, in his lone hours, may feel inclined to take an extra glass of wine to banish the memory of that figure in the dock, but never the Home Secretary who has denied the reprieve; like that conscientious murderer, Nana Sahib, he is perfectly free from hallucinations.

Nana felt no more remorse for what he had ordered to be done than the lunatic does who cuts the throat of his dearest and nearest under the devout belief that he is killing devils, and thereby benefiting mankind. Once or twice a regret had crossed his

mind that he had done so hastily, before victory was quite assured, and that it would have been more diplomatic if he had waited, but he banished these regrets as treason to the god and goddess whom he had served, and prayed the harder, so that his wordy adjuration might conceal the selfish and prudent regret which would intrude upon his anxiety and fears.

One hour passed, it seemed many to this feverish listener, during which the earth shook and the thunders rolled, while the hot smoke hid the hotter sun, and then came a sudden cessation, while the sun again flamed out of the fumes, and Nature seemed to have swooned,

Nana Sahib grew livid as he reached forward, his dark face framed by those sweet-scented jessamines, his white teeth gleaming between those open, pallid lips, and his heart ceasing to work — a moment spreading out to five minutes of intense stillness, while the picture floated before him of the taking the guns of Atherwa; that horror he had witnessed, therefore it floated up between him and the sugar plantations amidst the drifting smoke.

A mirage of silent, set faces, behind the gleaming bayonets thudding their handles against the breast-bones of the sepoy gunners and pinning them by pairs to the ground, the spouting of that obnoxious gore into the sunlight from the cleft hearts of the hapless sons of India, while the ruthless, short-robed devils plunged on like resistless Fate, and the natives broke and fled with shrill cries of horror, as one might do who sees a ghost.

The watcher saw this with throbless heart while he

listened for the shrill cries and mighty cheers, like the roar of the lion as he stills the scream of the antelope.

They came at last, the mingled scream, shout, and blood-curdling skirling of bagpipes, which Nana had expected after that awful vision, and then from the woods he saw the forerunners break in wild confusion and panic, which told him so plainly that his army was again defeated.

Ay, there was brother Bala on his white horse, bending over its neck as he urged it on at its fastest pace. Tantia would hang on to the last like the bull-dog that he was, so would the other generals; but the sight of Bala in the distance, with those other flying and unarmed pedestrians, was quite enough for Nana; with a howl of savage fury he leapt from the balcony into the hall, striking the obsequious slaves from his path, out to the courtyard of the zenana, and there vaulting unaided upon his Arab steed he shouted hoarsely:

"To the river, slaves—to the holy river Ganges!"

CHAPTER VII.

IN LUCKNOW.

NANA SAHIB, with his wives and treasures, fled into Oudh, where he was joined by Tantia Topí, Azim-Ullah, and the remnant of his broken army, while Havelock's men demolished that lovely pink and white marble palace of Bithúr until it was no longer habitable. The late owner saw the flames and smoke which burst from his homestead, and while cursing his want of forethought, vowed to be bitterly revenged if he got the chance, which seemed not at all unlikely

with those forty thousand rebels already up in arms in this province, and the crowds who were daily flocking to his standard, for the war was not yet nearly over.

After this, about six weeks passed of hard marching, hard fighting and constant harassment from the overwhelming but craven enemy, before the gallant Havelock led his sorely-tried, but ever victorious, if diminished, forces into the thickly-crowded streets of beautiful Lucknow, where they disputed each inch of the way with the bayonets between volleys of musketry and heavy charges of fire and lead from the guns, reaching the Residency just in time to save the lives of its noble defenders. What a scene that was, as the countrymen rushed into each other's arms regardless of social or military rank, while the almost hopeless women kissed these hardened warriors, and the children were caught up, embraced, and handed round, after which, the enthusiasm being over, they found themselves prisoners all, defenders and those whom they had tried to rescue, with a countless horde of infuriated and savage enemies surrounding them; still the gallant band of heroes had worked their way to the point which, for over two months, they had been striving so hard to reach, and that gave hope to all.

What awful evidences met their eyes as they looked about them; the marks of ten thousand round-shot, bullets lying about in countless myriads, and the churchyard crammed with the dead, while the wounded and sick were crowding the buildings set apart as hospitals. That last day's march had cost Havelock over five hundred men, officers, non-commisssioned officers and privates. Amongst others

who fell here was General Neil, who was shot through the head.

All the horrors of war were here represented in their most sickening and loathsome shapes; the ground and walls splashed with blood and brains, like a slaughter-yard, offal and putrid corpses tainting the air, and, more fearful even than the pestilential atmosphere were the dense clouds of disgusting flies which covered and blackened everything, large, cold and clammy, in their contact, as death, as they came from the festering corpses, which could not be covered by earth, and obstinately disputed each mouthful of food.

Sergeant Jackson redeemed himself in the estimation of his former companions, and so far attracted the notice of the commander that already he was raised from the ranks of the non-commissioned into that of the gentlemen; as Lieutenant Jackson he could now approach the father of Maggie Wilson boldly.

We will pass over the meeting between those long-parted lovers, for, although this accommodating hero felt no qualm of compunction about clasping that golden-haired girl to his heart, and afterwards, when the first transports were over, reproaching her for her flirting propensities during his absence, to those more in his confidence than Maggie was it looked hardly correct, and almost too Oriental.

Poor Maggie, she was no longer the giddy, rosy-cheeked girl she had been; a siege of this sort had added years and earnestness to the most youthful and thoughtless in that camp. She met her recreant lover with tears of joy running down her wan cheeks, while he choked and grew dim in the eyes as he

kissed them and all recollection of the dark-haired charmer away, thinking her bonnier than ever and feeling as fond and faithful as if no such word as inconstancy was to be found in the dictionary.

Major Waters fell by the side of General Neil in that advance, but, wonderful to say, his friend, Lieutenant Green, reached the Residency without a wound, although as reckless as ever. Since he had pledged himself to the Widow Finch fortune seemed to have favoured him. Sammy, also, and the dog Hector got through the withering tempest of fire safely, both coming in just behind the amulet-protected Jackson, who had not yet received a scratch.

Hector stuck to his boy-chum during that last rush, and never missed his rightful owner until, luckily for him, too late; but no one, not even a dog, could tell who had been left behind during that mad charge through the crowded streets with the loop-holed houses on each side vomiting their deadly lead upon them. At the last it was a race in the dusky night, with only the flames from those muskets and cannons to illuminate the faces of friends and foes.

But they were in, beside the desperate garrison, those who had not quitted earth, and the next problem which the generals had to solve was how to get out again, or failing that, how to keep themselves alive inside.

Fortunately the examination made next morning of the stores revealed the fact that there were provisions enough to last the united company in food for two more months, so, comforted on this score, they concentrated their attention upon the enemy, while they waited on another relief party coming to their rescue.

Sir Henry Lawrence was dead, the brave and resolute soldier of that beleaguered Residency, who had stood undaunted through the constant hurricane of red-hot shell and shot poured in upon him and his daily-diminishing force of less than a thousand men (Europeans and faithful natives all told) by two hundred and fifty thousand infuriated enemies, well drilled, well armed, and plentifully supplied with ammunition, and ably generalled.

Here he and his faithful followers had looked out on this delicious city of palaces, domes and ravishing gardens for five weary months, enclosed as they were within that foul and pestilential prison, the walls of which were daily being pounded to pieces, and the ground strewn with spent balls and dead bodies.

Here they had watched the distant fruit trees and flowers, with the sparkle of fountains, or the glint of the river Gumti, while the sun, as relentless as their enemies, beat down upon their devoted heads its deadly beams, and those cold, great, clammy, and loathsome flies crawled languidly over their exposed flesh, as they settled upon them in myriads, and would not be brushed away.

Here they had stood to their guns till they were red-hot, replying to and facing the murderous onslaught of cannon and musketry, incessantly belching out their flames, with less space between the combatants than the width of the Strand; often only a few yards apart they gathered, and poured in volley after volley from morning till night; from sunset to sunrise, without a pause, that rattle and whistling of musketry and thunder, crashing, thudding, and exploding of grape, round-shot, and stink-

pots went on, until their senses became so maddened and their ears so used to the ceaseless din, that they had learnt to sleep calmly through it all, when off duty, and hear each other's whispers, as men will become used to the rattling of machinery in time.

For five weary months they had endured this hell of noise, flames and torture, burning heat and exhaustion, fiery thirst and poisoned air, or shivered under the heavy rains, from which there was no escape, while friends sank by their sides, from sunstroke, fever, cholera, or the more painless bullet and ball; while those who could work, rammed in the powder and shot like men at the pumps of a coffin-ship during a storm.

Deaf, at last, to the roaring and pounding of war they could hear the clashing of the cymbals and the blaring of brass instruments, with the beating of the tom-toms, in the rear of those vast environing hordes, while they strained their ears to catch the first shrill shriek of the bagpipes, which would soar over those barbaric notes, and tell them of the coming of their friends, as they strained their eyes through those dense volumes of sulphureous smoke for the gleam of the red jackets, or the fluttering of the tartans. For five long months that unconquered flag of England had fluttered, or drooped limply from their roof-top, while England's sons and daughters stood undaunted beneath it, waiting—waiting on the relief.

And the faithful four hundred natives — who had been seven hundred and sixty-five at the beginning of the siege—never faltered from their duty to their masters, whose salt they had eaten, although daily jeered at, or implored by their blood-relations to quit

the Faringhee, and come to their own kindred. These dark-skinned heroes, although perhaps regarded as traitors by their own kin, nobly justified the trust which Sir Henry Lawrence had placed in them, by becoming fratricides for duty, and dying at their post. Theirs was a mighty sacrifice, with defeat and death looking so sure.

But Jessie Brown had had her dream, and the pibrochs, which had sounded so sweet and fresh in her home-sick heart and spirit-ears, had become a reality even to the dazed senses of the most sceptical. The red coats and the kilts had burst through those caverns of smoke and flame like heaven-sent angels; but the one who had guarded them through those months, with his clear head and keen soldier's instinct, was lying with those who had loved him and died with him; and on his humble grave the proud inscription—"Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty."

During the next two months after the entrance of Sir Henry Havelock, with his Bayard friend, Sir James Outram, and the additional force, the fiery siege went on as energetically as ever; while houses were blown up by the besieged, so that Sir Colin Campbell, whom they had heard was on the march, should find a freer passage than they had done. The sappers also were kept busy throwing up new works, repairing damages, making mines, trenches and shafts. Twenty-one shafts were sunk, aggregating two hundred feet in depth, and with a gallery of three thousand two hundred and ninety-one feet, a task without parallel in modern warfare, as Sir James Outram reported in one of his dispatches.

The enemy also were busy making counter-mines against the palaces and outposts, of which some exploded, and did their work of destruction, while the others were either blown in, or the enemy driven out of them at the point of the bayonet, and their galleries captured.

Every hour of the day and night was fully taken up with these measures of defence and sorties, so that Lieutenant Jackson had little time for love-making. Still, he managed to get a word with his sweetheart, in odd corners, where the shot was least heavy, now and again ; or she would venture out on some errand, even when it was pretty concentrated, for, like the men, the last heavy months had rendered the women careless to dangers of this sort. Besides, no spot was safe from bursting shells, as even the wounded and sick in hospital had found to their cost. Therefore, with death spreading all round, they felt that Providence only could protect them, with one part of the camp as dangerous as the other.

He always ordered her to shelter, on these rash visits ; but she was wilful, and would not always obey him, therefore he took the precaution of hanging about her neck that charmed amulet, besides giving her the rings to wear. He told her that they were gifts from an *aged* sorceress, whose life he had saved once ; and, content with this answer and the gifts, she consented to wear them always conspicuously. Doubtless these charms saved her life scores of times when she persisted in standing exposed beside him on the walls.

One afternoon, while surveying the enemy from the walls, there fell beside him amongst other more

dangerous missiles, a harmless enough looking arrow, with a small package attached to the shaft. Taking up the arrow, and examining the packet, he discovered a few lines in Hindostanee addressed to him; they were from his unknown, and lately unthought of, jailoress.

"Agi Jau, I am near you, with ten thousand men, to bear you and your sire away, when you are wearied with killing, and ready once more for love. But I will be patient till my Lord says he will come. You do not wear the amulet, but no matter, for your god-like form is known, and no one will harm you as I am watching over your sacred life."

"Confound it!" muttered the new-made lieutenant. "This is awkward, very; suppose she sees Maggie, there'll be no holding in the tigress."

He looked round him at the different palace windows in the distance, from one of which he saw the fluttering of a scarf, to which he responded by a wave of his hand. At the same instant Maggie Wilson joined him, and in one of her most affectionate moods, for she ran into his arms and kissed him.

"Oh, dash it all, but the fat is in the fire now," thought this twice blessed-with-love young man; then he said aloud quickly:

"Back, for your life, Maggie, this is the worst spot in the whole Residency for you at present."

"Why, George?"

"Because they are concentrating their fire here for some reason or other, see!"

Half-a-dozen shells came whizzing over their heads as he spoke, and dropping into the yard, exploded, without, however, doing much damage.

"Your amulet protects us, you see, George; best let me stand in front of you, and you will be safe. Why, this is nothing to what it was before you came; we can count the fireworks now, but then it was impossible."

In spite of his entreaties, this fearless daughter of a soldier stood beside him for a little while, with the bullets whistling around their ears, and the round-shot humming above their heads, looking carelessly over that surging ocean of savage life, while she tantalized him with her endearments. At last, with a final embrace, she left him, and went back to her duty as nurse in the hospital.

"Just like her inconstant sex," groaned the lieutenant, glancing over in the direction of that far-off window again to find it, as he expected it to be, empty. "When a fellow expects kisses he gets nothing but abuse, and when he don't want them they are showered down on him. By Jove, but I expect those ten thousand protectors will get a different order about my sacred person to-night."

The next day, while again at his post on the ramparts, a second arrow, with missile attached, dropped in upon him with the other leaden accompaniments.

"Now for the rough edge of her pencil," muttered the lieutenant, as he opened the letter.

"Agi Jau, forgive me. I was angry with you last night, as I was on the first night that you kissed me at the Mosque of Delhi; therefore I killed my favourite slave girl, for which I have much sorrow to-day, now that I am calm and can reason the matter out."

"Ay, and would have killed me also, if I had been

near you, I bet," thought the reader, going on with this interesting epistle.

"I was angry, Lord of my life, that you could not trust me enough, but now I know your ways are not quite our ways, so I must be patient until I learn them, when all will be right; yet why did you not tell me that you had a *sister* in Lucknow, as well as a father?"

"Halloo! in luck again," murmured the fortunate young man, stroking his yellow moustache complacently, and going on with his love-letter.

"I thought when I saw the golden-haired maid embrace you, that you had been false to your vows, and in my wrath I struck down my favourite when she suggested that it might be your sister; but when I looked again, I saw that you were both of one milk, for her tresses were the golden colour of the hair upon your lip; therefore, I grew satisfied, and sorry for my foolish blow. No matter, beloved one, slaves are easily bought, and now I shall love your little sister also, as well as your sire, and marry her to a prince; she wears the amulet, let her keep it so that no harm may come to her when the hour of slaughter comes. You are safe, my king, my hero, I have seen you in the battle, how you can fight; my heart beat with pride when I saw your sword flash round two days ago in the street, even although it was my own people who fell beneath your arm."

"Thank heaven for that mistake," fervently uttered the lieutenant, as he made wadding of that love-letter, and potted a sepoy twenty yards from him with the charge. "Maggie is so far safe, while this pleasant delusion lasts in that she-demon's mind."

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR COLIN TO THE RESCUE.

"THE Campbells were coming!"

Resolute and active, old Sir Colin, with his four thousand and seven hundred men, had overcome all difficulties in the way, until at length he reached and relieved the force under McIntyre at the Alambágh; he had also seen that daring adventurer, Thomas Henry Kavanagh, with his faithful ally and guide, Kanánjí Lál, who after a thousand dangers and risks of death by torture, had managed to pass through the insurgent hosts in his disguise as a Badmash, and deliver his despatches from Sir James Outram safely; when the flag was elevated on the turrets of the Alambágh to show the defenders of the Residency that their messenger was alive and well, then hope became certainty, and their hours of captivity were limited.

After storing all the camp equipage not wanted for the assault in view, within the Alambágh, where he also left the 75th, now reduced to three hundred men, and more or less debilitated with sickness, Sir Colin Campbell began his march in the following order, dividing his army into six brigades:

The Naval Brigade, under the command of the immortal Captain William Peel, who had brought with them the eight heavy guns of the *Shannon*.

The Artillery Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Crawford, and comprising the batteries of Blunt, Remmington, Travers, Bridge and Bourchier, having twenty-two pieces of cannon.

The Cavalry Brigade, led by Brigadier Little, comprising two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, one each of the 1st, 2nd and 5th Punjáb Cavalry and Hodson's Horse, altogether seven hundred strong.

Captain Hodson, with his dashing company, had joined Sir Colin's forces after the protracted siege and fall of Delhi on the 21st September, where he had distinguished himself, amongst other daring actions, by arresting the King of Delhi, and putting his sons to death, almost single-handed, in the midst of his infuriated army. The news of this collapse of the Mogul and the re-capture of this great city acted like a spur on the men about to attack this equally important city of Lucknow.

The third Infantry Brigade, commanded by General Greathed, and composed of the remnant of the 8th, a battalion formed of detachments of the three regiments shut up in the Residency, and the Punjáb 2nd Native Infantry.

The fourth brigade, led by General Adrian Hope of the 93rd Highlanders, consisted of his own regiment, a wing of the 53rd, and the 4th Punjáb Infantry.

The fifth brigade comprised a battalion of men proceeding to join the regiments to be relieved, and the sixth brigade was led by General Russell, and comprised the 23rd Fusiliers and a portion of the 82nd.

Brigadier-General Sir James Hope Grant directed the operations, under the supervision of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Colin Campbell.

The first place conquered was the Dilkúsha, or "Heart's Delight," a hunting castle of the ancient Kings of Oude, where they were met by the enemy in great force, and who, after a skirmishing battle of

two hours, were driven across the grounds and canal by Colonel Hamilton and the 79th Highlanders, and chased with great slaughter past the Martini Palace.

Pushing on steadily, they next took this wonderful creation of a palace, with its outside stairs and curious ornaments, driving the enemy before them and slaying without mercy. Sir Colin had secured the position thus gained, by placing in the gardens Hope's brigade and Remmington's troops, planting Russell's brigade on the left in front of the Dilkúsha, and Little, with his cavalry, in a line drawn from the canal on his right to a wall of the Dilkúsha on his left; later on, he withdrew General Russell's brigade and sent him to occupy two villages on the canal, covering the left of the advance columns.

The insurgents now gathered in dense masses, and lined the opposite side of the canal, and advanced to check these movements of the army, but Bourchier's and Peel's batteries played on them with such deadly effect that they were literally crushed out of their position and forced to retire about five o'clock, leaving the ground covered with their slain.

Here, in the position they had gained, the British bivouacked for the night, for Sir Colin was particularly careful of his men, and when he possibly could he spared them all unnecessary fatigue and danger. The next day was spent in occasional skirmishes, and preparing for the final advance on the morrow, the commander having signalled to Outram, by signals previously arranged by Kavanagh, that he would be with him then.

Early on the morning of the 14th November, a strong body of cavalry, with Blunt's horse artillery and

a company of the 53rd forming the advance guard, set out from the right, crossed the canal—then dry—and marching for a mile along the banks of the River Gúmtí, reached the road running parallel with Sikandárábagh.

The guns were pushed rapidly forward, that is, they dashed on straight, according to the rules of war and the fire brigade, allowing nothing to impede their progress ; whatever lay in their path they rolled over it at full gallop. If a man slipped and fell in the way, like the car of Juggernaut these iron monsters passed over him with hardly a thud, while his eyes sprang from their sockets and the survivors leapt aside with horror at the awful sight. Several harmless fakirs chose this mode of sacrificing their lives to the gods as the horse artillery rushed on.

As the British advanced, they were at first completely unopposed, for Sir Colin had so deceived the enemy that they were not expecting this movement, even although the advance guard was followed by the main body of the infantry, until, making the sharp turn from the river bank, they reached the road.

Then all at once a most tremendous fire opened upon their flank from the enclosure which lined the roadway and the loopholed Sikandárábagh—they were literally broadside to the enemy's batteries and in a most critical position.

The gallant Blunt, looking round, saw a plateau whence he could assail the citadel, and at once turning his company of horse artillery, galloped up the bank and, unlimbering, opened fire on the Sikandárábagh. This important movement—the smartest on record—changed the position, and drew upon his devoted company the fire of the rebels, while it allowed Hope's

brigade of infantry to come on with a rush and clear the enclosures bordering the lane and a large building near them.

The light and heavy guns were now playing upon the massive walls of the Sikandárábagh and before long a small breach was opened, which no sooner was perceived, than with a wild shout the men of the 93rd and the Sikhs rushed towards it at full speed.

A Sikh of the 4th Rifles reached it first, and was shot dead as he sprang through it. Richard Cooper, a young officer of the 93rd, came next, and with a flying leap he landed through the hole unhurt, and was in the struggle without a pause.

Then came Lumsden, the interpreter, with Ewart and twelve men, Sikhs and Highlanders, followed by Burroughs, of the 93rd, who was immediately wounded.

The enclosure in which these fourteen heroes landed was one hundred and fifty yards square, with towers at the angles, a square building in the centre, and held by more than two thousand armed natives.

They rushed forward to the fight without considering this, and slaughtered their hundreds. Lumsden was killed; Cooper got a fearful cut across the forehead; while Ewart still held his ground, slashing and killing the circle who were round him, until the front gate was burst open and reinforcements poured in.

Then began the struggle for life and death at close quarters. These two thousand defenders of the citadel were trained sepoys, who had no hope of mercy, so they were desperate—nor did they receive any.

Tearing the iron bars from the windows, the infuriated Highlanders and Sikhs leaped headlong amongst the desperate sepoys, their bayonets flashing

in the light as they dug into and turned them within the hearts of the wretches, shouting between their grinding teeth as each bayonet went home, "Cawnpore! Cawnpore!! Cawnpore!!!"

So the butchery went on, until not a native was left alive; they fought silently, and took their just doom without asking quarter. Then the avengers waded through the gore, which splashed in their faces as they stumbled out again to the sunlight, and dashed on, their thirst for blood still unappeased, and maddened with the lust of war.

On to the Shah Nugguf, half-a-mile nearer to the Residency, Sir Colin's army poured, the great mosque and gardens of which were crammed with defenders and loopholed all round, where they were exposed to a deadly fire of heavy guns and musketry, which, from different other points, were brought by the clustering enemy to play upon this environed band.

Sir Colin Campbell sat on his white horse in front of the full fire, with his men falling rapidly on every side, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the solid walls, upon which even the heaviest guns could make no impression, while even the dauntless Peel grew gloomy as he saw one of his tumbrils blown up.

Then Sir Colin roused himself and shouted: "Soldiers, I did not think to employ you again to-day, but this place *must* be taken, so as the guns cannot make a way for us we must find one for ourselves. I will go with you to find it."

A shout rose at the words, and after him they rushed again and again, while the heavy guns of Peel laid at close quarters, and the dashing efforts of Middleton's battery played on these granite walls in vain

They were baffled in spite of their courage and indefatigable energy. Night was coming on fast and success was as far off as ever.

Then Sir Adrian Hope, collecting some fifty men, stole through the jungle unperceived to a part where one of his sergeants, Paton by name, had told him three hours before that he thought he could see a vulnerable point. A narrow fissure met his eyes in the gathering gloom, and up this one man was pushed cautiously, who helped up the second, and so on.

More men were sent for and drawn up to the top, and then they crept forward, taking the defenders by such surprise that they made no further resistance, but at once fled from the place. The Shah Nugguf was theirs with such ease after three hours of most desperate and disastrous fighting.

Each man had fought hard that day and richly deserved his night's rest, so Sir Colin called a halt, certain now about the success of the next day. He addressed his troops before they slept that night, and told them that they had accomplished an action almost unexampled in war; so, with a final shout from the gratified ranks, they turned in and slept the sleep of the just.

Next day, refreshed with their night's rest, they pushed on again to meet Havelock and his party, who were working and advancing from the other side; another heavy day of work for both parties, before the Observatory, Mess-house, and Motí Mahall were won, while the great guns of the enemy thundered against them from the Kaisarbagh, and the streets were chock-a-block with desperate sepoys disputing every inch of the way.

A mile and a half yet spread between Campbell and Havelock, upon which the guns from the Kaisarbagh played with unremitting fury; but it must be crossed. So Outram, Havelock, Napier, Eyre, young Havelock (Sir Henry's son), Dodson, Sitwell, Russell, and Kavanagh crossed it at a rush. Napier, Sitwell, Russell, and young Havelock were struck down, but the others reached the Motí Mahall unhurt, and then the last relief of Lucknow was an accomplished fact, while the chiefs met, amid loud cheering, and shook hands.

Then, after Sir James Outram had expressed his congratulations to the brave Highlanders, Sir Henry Havelock harangued the troops, in spite of the fact that his only son had just fallen, and as he did so the guns still kept up an uninterrupted firing from the Kaisarbagh. Fortunately, the bullet which had knocked down his son made only a slight wound, so that the brave old father's heart was not afterwards wrung with this anguish.

The chain of communication was so far established, yet the fighting was by no means over yet, for it continued in the streets, and the Kaiserbagh was still unsilenced. Several furious onslaughts also took place by the insurgents on the pickets between the barracks and the Sikandárábagh, but Remmington took this matter in hand and, after some heavy fighting, repulsed the enemy.

Captain Peel was then deputed to turn the fire from the Kaisarbagh with his heavy guns, which he did for the next four days, making considerable breaches in the building, and leading the enemy to expect an assault.

But after a consultation of the chiefs, it was decided to abandon Lucknow as untenable; therefore, while

the heavy guns of the *Shannon* continued to attract the attention of the rebels, they determined to remove the wounded, sick, women and children. So on the night of the 22nd the imprisoned force began their exodus, getting all away in safety to Dilkusha; and so secretly and thoroughly was this accomplished, that the rebels continued to storm the Residency for many hours after that place had been deserted, under the impression that the British were still there. Hope, who brought up the rear guard, after bursting the guns not wanted, joined Havelock and the others at the Dilkusha on the 23rd.

A universal gloom damped the joy of the relieved garrison and the relief forces when it was announced to them next day that the heroic and God-fearing General Sir Henry Havelock had passed to his eternal rest, even in the moment of victory and escape from that fatal Residency, which had likewise claimed Sir Henry Lawrence as its victim. His system was shattered with anxiety and the hardships inseparable upon this harassing warfare. Yet he died calmly, saying, "I die contented and happy. I have for forty years so ruled my life, that when death came I might face it without fear."

So he passed quietly away, after all the storms of the vanished hard months at this palace of the Heart's Delight, and they buried him him in the Alumbagh, his last hours soothed by the knowledge that the women and children whom he had gone through so many trials and dangers to save, were at last safe. And surely that is satisfaction enough for any man, to have the proud assurance that his work is accomplished before he bids farewell to Earth.

Book Fourth.—Extermination.

CHAPTER I.

TANTIA TOPÍ.

SINCE the advent of Sir Colin Campbell in Upper India, the natives knew that they were fighting with the ropes about their necks; there was no escape for them from a shameful death if captured, first degradation, and afterwards annihilation, for it was the rule to fasten Mahomedan and Hindoo together to the cannon's mouth and blow them in that fashion to atoms, so that the flesh of the one contaminated the other by mixing together.

They were not conquered yet, for the rebels of Oudh, the Panjáb, and Central India could yet gather in their hundreds of thousands, while they had some able leaders still at large, conspicuous amongst them being the talented if bloody-minded Tantia Topí, while the Ranee of Jhansi and the Begum of Oudh were both great Moslem influences and resolute women, who could and did direct their armies; Nana Sahib also, the Hindoo representative, was free and active; so that the sepoys and their friends took heart as they swarmed towards Gwalior, where the leaders were holding their court, resolved to make one more stand for India and life.

The Grand Mogul was a prisoner, while his sons were slain; but was not also one of the mightiest of

their enemies dead—Sir Henry Havelock, who had driven them for the time out of Cawnpore? General Neil also was dead, who had blown so many of their leaders from the cannon's mouth, with Sir Henry Lawrence, who had held them so long at bay in Lucknow, also many other great, and hated as well as dreaded, men. Surely this little island of the Faringhee had sent all her great men out to them, and would have no more left after they had beaten and killed this white-headed old terror, Sir Colin Campbell, while they still had the Peshwa and the Begum and the Ranee to lead them on with Tantia Topí Behadúr, to say nothing of the warrior Maulavi of Fyzabad and all the rest of their generals, left alive to give them victory. So they hugged their timid hearts that all would go well with them, and crowded to the standards of the Prophet and the Monkey God Hanuman.

Tantia Topí was an astute man of the world, and he knew well that the game was lost, although he never said so; but he loved the smell of battle, and meant to enjoy himself thoroughly before his hour came; so he kept up a brave front and went about his business in a practical and logical fashion.

While Sir Colin Campbell was busy at Lucknow, Tantia played a clever trick with General Windham, which once more almost gained him the possession of Cawnpore; indeed, but for the sudden coming back of that ever-active commander-in-chief, he would have been once more master of the place, and repeated the massacres of the former occasion, for, like the bush-ranger who has once committed murder as well as robbery under arms, or the pirate who has scuttled

one ship with her crew, he was perfectly indifferent as to the number of his crimes now; all he wanted was to make his name a terror before he was caught and hanged, and live as long as he could.

He knew and appreciated the somewhat reckless bravery of the holder of Cawnpore, General Windham, and accordingly he lured him first to the Bridge of Banni, and after that tempted him successfully to march six miles along the Kalpi road, where he engaged with him and, by reason of his overwhelming odds, forced him to a very weak position, where, after many changes of fortune, he drove the company back to Cawnpore, where he followed with his once more inspirited legions, seized the station, fired the bungalows, and destroyed the clothing and stores prepared for the coming relieved garrison of Lucknow, and forced Windham to take refuge in the entrenchments, while Tantia environed him, and renewed the siege as it had been before.

Tantia Topí had no hopes of holding his present position with the weak-kneed crew under him; he felt this to be utterly impossible, although he spoke bravely, and got his master, Nana, to harangue the troops flatteringly as Behadúrs; all he wanted was to prolong the struggle, and do as much damage as he could to the side he was against — not so much through hatred as through despair. Tantia Topí was one of those men who grow boisterous under disaster when it is unredeemable, who laugh and get drunk when they have thrown their final cast, and take their adieus to fortune and life with a merry but grim jest; some men are that way constituted, and the earth is well rid of them, although no one denies to

them their just meed of praise for pluck if not for virtue.

In his own tent Tantia, who had no harem to worry about, drank his spirits like a buccaneer, and after laughing outrageously with his friends, set himself down to smoke and think alone.

"If I only had half the number of men at my call, with bones in their backs, I could drive these splendid fellows into the sea, and hold India until my dotage, but as it is they will hunt me like a rabbit in a few more months. Ah, my Lord Peshwa, you honour your humble friend and slave."

It was Nana, who had entered unannounced, and who sat himself down on the mat.

"Well, Behadúr, methinks that we are winning yet, thanks to you," answered the master cheerfully, yet with a nervous twitching of his lips.

"Of course! Of course! Did I not predict to my lord that all would be well when he mourned over his lost estate of Bithúr," cried Tantia jovially, waving his hookah gently.

"Your estate, Tantia Behadúr."

"As you like, royal master, I hold it for you as your liege slave. Yes, we will yet drive those cursed usurpers into the black water; rest easy on that score and sleep in peace, for have I not said it?"

Tantia Topí looked at his master with a merry yet affectionate glance.

At this moment three cannon salutes in the direction of the Ganges startled the nervous Nana, who sprang up in alarm, while Tantia still smoked on quietly.

"What is that, Tantia Behadúr?"

"Possibly some of the gunners who have seen you

enter are saluting your highness," answered his lieutenant quietly.

As he spoke Azim-Ullah entered hastily, and said:

"The British forces from Lucknow under Sir Colin Campbell have taken possession of the bridge of boats."

"Just so, friend Azim-Ullah, then their doom is sealed," replied Tantia, with a quick look at his friend. "Meantime your highness had better return to Gwalior, where you will be safe till we drive this little badger back. Azim-Ullah will bring you news of our victory in good time. Perhaps you will escort his royal highness out of the lines, Azim-Ullah, Behadúr?"

He stooped humbly for the blessing of his Brahmin chief, and watched him steadfastly until, with the Mahomedan, he left the tent, after which he flung aside his pipe, and taking another quaff from the flask which he had concealed in his breast on his master's entrance, he cried:

"Now, Tantia Topí, for the beginning of the end."

He stretched himself, and went out, returning about an hour afterwards, accompanied by his orderly.

"Call me at daybreak to-morrow if nothing occurs sooner, I want to sleep."

The orderly salaamed and went out, while this remarkable man stretched himself on his tiger-skin rug, and was almost instantly asleep.

He slept deeply, calmly, and quietly, with his hand under his cheek, as the brave man may sleep on the eve of his execution, who is under the impression that he has done his duty during life.

At early dawn this able general arose, and after his

bath and coffee, lit a cheroot and, mounting the horse which his orderly held in readiness, he set off at a gallop along his lines until he came to a lofty mound with sloping sides, up which he urged his well-trained steed until they reached the top ; here he had a distant view of portions of the British Army and his own troops as well.

Through his field-glass he could make out the figure on the white horse, surrounded by that able staff, the figure whom he respected and dreaded most amongst the British Army—the calm, stern, self-possessed, and resolute commander-in-chief, Sir Colin Campbell, who did nothing in unconsidered haste until the moment for action came, but then became like a flash of lightning.

Tantia Topí knew well what the old man was lingering with his leashed dogs of war for, on the other side of the canal, for he could see beyond the protecting batteries the long procession of conveyances and carts defiling down the grand trunk road towards Allahabad, with the women and children, the sick and wounded, inside those litters, doolies and covered carts ; the lion was getting rid of his helpless ones and encumbrances before he made the spring.

Tantia Topí turned from contemplating that pigmy force of invaders—five thousand infantry and six hundred cavalry, with thirty-five guns in all—and regarded his own enormous force with a scornful curl of his thick lips.

He had over twenty-five thousand men, most of them well-trained soldiers, to oppose that paltry five thousand six hundred British, with guns in the same overwhelming proportions, and with arms and ammu-

nition almost limitless. His men were natives of the soil, who could stand its deadly climatic changes with impunity, whereas the climate acted as his best friend and killed more of these invaders than his armies ever managed to do.

He had also done his best with this immense army by placing them in so strong a position that success should have been certain with any other nation than those rice-eating and harem-keeping Asiatics, who fell like ripe corn before the swing of those Northern scythes.

His centre occupied the town, the streets of which were carefully barricaded towards the enemy, with the Ganges canal between the two forces; he had thrown a special bridge over this canal, with heavy batteries guarding it and the other bridges. His left wing rested on and was protected by the broad Jumna, while his right flank was covered in front, as it spread over the plain, by lime-kilns and mounds of brick.

Nothing had been forgotten, as far as this talented leader could calculate, no detail omitted by which success might be assured and these handful of strangers swallowed up, and yet in his mind's eye he saw the result of Bithúr and the former engagements, which he had planned out as carefully, when it came to the tug.

"It is their gods which have doomed the Hindoos, and their wives which have destroyed the Mahomedans; their hearts are filled with water instead of blood, and their bodies are framed in gristle instead of bones, while these hard-headed, sinewy Faringhees build up their muscles and bones with the sacred and accursed flesh, and quench their thirst with the for-

bidden strong drinks, therefore they are able to conquer while we have to fly. Curse the gods of India, and the Prophet of Islam, who between them have made us a nation of slaves and cowards!"

He rose in his saddle and shook his clenched fist at the upper space, then, with a short, bitter laugh, he turned his horse's head and galloped back furiously to his own quarters.

Tantia Topí had worked out the problem of his countrymen's lack of animal stamina from logical deductions, for he had long ago relinquished his caste through his indulgences and habits, and had become of the atheistic order which was at that period scarce in India, but has now grown so widespread and powerful; in fact he was one of the early, if not the earliest, of the protestants from the olden faith and usages.

But beyond the very limited circle of his most intimate followers, he was no propagandist of this atheism, which, if known to the Hindoo portion of his army, would have lost him his authority and influence; therefore he had to be careful, and taste of the forbidden luxuries in private.

His orderly, with his cook and body-servants, were discreet persons, who had become disciples in their master's robust ideas, therefore they assisted him willingly to delude the general eye, so that when he reached his quarters, he found a breakfast ready for him such as an English gentleman might have considered good enough, but what would have sent his master, Nana, into holy fits.

A couple of grilled kidneys, followed by a curried chicken, and—horror of horrors to both Mussulman and Hindoo—a few slices of cold ham, washed down

by a bottle of light white wine, and terminating with coffee and cigars, prepared Tantia to face the anxieties of another day.

The remains of that forbidden feast were smuggled carefully out of sight, the ham rolled up in fresh leaves and deposited inside a large travelling trunk, of which the cook kept the key, and then the guard announcing to the outside staff that General Tantia Topí's morning *devotions* were over, they crowded in for a general council of war.

Azim-Ullah, the Maulavi of Fyzabad, Bala Sahib, Rao Sahib, the Nawab of Banda, Rajah of Bannpore, with the Ranee of Jhansi, and the unveiled, deposed Begum of Oudh, with her stalwart paramour, without whom she seldom travelled, came in to the council that morning with a number of other leaders, who had brought their own subjects into the field and expected a voice in the disposal of them.

Tantia respected the opinions of Azim-Ullah, Rao Sahib, the Begum of Oudh, and the Ranee of Jhansi, but the others he treated with respectful indifference.

"There will be no fighting to-day, my illustrious Behadûrs; the enemy is too busy transporting their wounded and females to Allahabad, but to-morrow the fun will begin, and we are all ready for them."

"But can we not stop the removal of these scotched snakes and breeders of scorpions?" exclaimed the fierce Begum.

"No, sovereign Lady, it would spoil our after chances. Best let them go, for we can settle Allahabad after we have broken up their present defenders, and that we can easily do—if our troops stand firm," replied Tantia with a grim smile at the termination

of his speech, which was, however, lost on the company, who were on this day confident and resolute.

"You have seen the Peshwa safely to the fortress of Gwálior, friend Azzim Behadúr?"

"No, our master would not leave us; he is at present in his palace, waiting on events," replied Azim-Ullah.

"'Tis as well, perhaps, his presence, with that of her majesty and our illustrious friends here, will inspire the troops," said Tantia, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "Come, great ones, there is nothing more to arrange. You will look after the left wing, brave and impetuous Maulavi, with your able supports; you Azim will command the right, while I will see to the centre, where the first blow of the battle will take place; let us show ourselves to our troops."

Outside the tent Nana Sahib joined them on his elephant, and the forenoon was passed moving amongst the hopeful and enthusiastic troops, to the sound of the barbaric music which the easterns like so much, as if the engagement was over and they were celebrating their victory. Tantia Topí looked with his customary sardonic smile on all this premature festivity and joy, or passed ribald remarks about the Nautch girls to his aide-de-camp, while his sombre eyes opened and narrowed with that inconstant movement, which showed a mind pre-occupied with matters of greater import than the uncovered neck of a Nautch girl, or her bold and luring glances.

That afternoon and evening the chief of the Marathas held a festival within his town palace, in which was located that fatal well; it was a regular

Sardanapalus feast, with the royal guests all about him, a feast of flowers, confectionery, and such drinks as are permitted to the sacred and the faithful; while Tantia sat amongst them more grimly jocular than ever, saying such words in the wanton Begum's jewelled ears as caused even her to blush like a girl; but they were good friends this pair, with a mutual admiration for each other's gifts, and a vast indulgence for their individual failings; so that although the love-sick widow of Jhansi moved away disgusted with this ribald play of words, the wicked and ferocious Begum only laughed.

"People in love are singularly sensitive about the sacredness of the passion," observed Tantia, looking with a broad smile, yet with a shaded glance of pathos, after the widow; "she is thinking of that soldier fancy of hers whom we have pledged ourselves to guard like a token from Vishnu or a hair from the beard of your holy prophet; but we know better how it must all end, don't we, Queen of the Universe?"

"He may turn out a good man, he is strong and young, I hear, so don't grudge her her fleeting joys," replied the Begum.

"I don't, I grudge none of the butterflies their hour of pleasure," replied Tantia, somewhat fiercely, as he rose and prepared to go. "Only I must have mine also, and I cannot find it in this hall of iced sherbet and bon-bons; good-night, my Lady of Oudh." Saying which he stalked out of the palace, and after a careful look round the camp, entered his tent, where his faithful attendants waited to console him with the forbidden nectar of the loathed Faringhee.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROUTE TO GWALIOR.

NEXT morning early the battle began, with that abruptness and impetuosity which distinguished all Sir Colin Campbell's actions after his careful preparations were made.

Tantia Topí was at his post in the centre, directing the battery of the bridge, and sending a murderous fire against the advancing enemy, which kept them at bay for fully two hours; at least that was the appearance which the field presented to the delighted eyes of his gunners; but their leader wished that the day had not been so still, which kept the smoke about them so long that he could see no further than his own immediate locality.

It was a wily foe he had to encounter, who dealt out surprises; so leaving Rao Sahib to direct the battery, he mounted his black Arab and darted towards the right, which the Maulavi was commanding, his weak wing as he knew, for the plain was open and could be approached from the other side of the canal.

He came upon a scene of disaster, but his men were fighting desperately, inspired by the fiery words of the excitable and daring Maulavi; but what were words or multitudes against that solid bayonet-fringed phalanx, which pushed them from mound to mound back upon the centre? His men were behaving splendidly, fighting furiously and taking their quietus like heroes, but they were falling like corn before the

implacable reaping machine, just as he had known they would.

Backwards they forced him and his masses upon his main body; right on to the bridge they were pushed, where the guns of Captain Peel were playing wild havoc, and silencing that battery he had been so careful over, as if the guns had been made of tin and the men were marionettes; guns, after all, can only be handled by heroes.

Tantia Topí arrived in time to see the Highlanders, Sikhs and 53rd rush across the bridge with loud shouts, and his own overwhelming host fling down their weapons and receive the bayonets in their backs; in vain he shrieked, cursed, and struck at the craven cowards; in vain he tried to reach the front ranks and meet his death like a man; it was all over in a minute, while he was forced back with the rushing masses who were making in frantic haste for Gwalior.

Through the town they rushed, as complete a panic-stricken rout as had been witnessed since the war began; Nana and the princes joining them after he had set his palace on fire, which flamed behind them as they ran, leaving guns, baggage, muskets, everything that could cumber them; with that relentless white-haired Nemesis and his cavalry after them, slaughtering, as the horse of Cromwell slaughtered the Presbyterians after the battle of Dunbar.

To the fourteenth milestone these vengeful butchers followed that great pack of stampeding sheep, lining the roadway with corpses as they galloped, then the victors turned back wearied and glutted with their defenceless victims. Cawnpore was at last avenged.

Tantia Topí with his royal friends rode all the way to Gwalior, and put up at the Castle that night, leaving the rabble to shift for themselves as best they could.

Tantia was wearied, but grimly jocular, as usual, for he knew where to find the spirits; so he sat amongst that disconsolate throng and laughed wildly as he jested over the defeat of his army.

"A man may make a house, but if he has nothing except chapatis to make it with, why should he not laugh when the hungry elephant comes along and munches it up?"

This he shouted boisterously as he rolled his insolent drink-swimming eyes over the trembling company, and pinched with savage playfulness the rounded arms of the flabby Begum, while her sooty-faced paramour did his best to grin from the other side.

"Oh that I had an army of women, like you, my Begum, or you, sweet Ranee with the covered face, then we would drive these pale-cheeked Faringhees to the hell they came from; woman to man would be all I ask to do the trick, but with these things who have beards on their chin, who can fight?"

"Tantia Behadúr, what do you advise?" cried Nana appealingly.

"That we stay here and rest where we are for the present safe," said Tantia remorselessly, "and call on the harems to help us; give me two thousand Amazons like the Begum of Oudh, my Lord, and I will bring you Sir Colin Campbell and his crew to flay alive if it pleases you."

"And failing that?"

"Nothing more; we are safe here for a time, and

the elephant will find us when he wants us ; we also have hordes of men yet to put before their guns; perhaps the divine gods, with Allah, will give us victory if we pray hard enough," replied Tantia gently, recovering himself as he looked upon his sorely distressed chief and the moody Maulavi.

"Amen!" answered the devout Brahmin Prince as he bent his head, then Tantia rose abruptly.

"I have the fugitives to look after, my Lord ; pray excuse me while I see that the sentinels are all at their posts."

With these words he swung out of the audience hall, with his head thrown back and his cheeks puffed out.

"A proper man our Tantia Bahadúr is, although he abhors women," observed the Begum, as she turned towards the dark-haired Mummoo Khan at her side, who sullenly replied :

"Does he abhor women so much, Queen of the World?"

"So they say, and I have no experience to the contrary," she replied quickly, taking possession of his hand, at which the others smiled, agitated as they were.

Tantia Topí stood amongst the guards, and received the fugitives as they entered the gates, domiciling them, and counting them up, like the good general that he was.

No reproaches passed his lips, but many a compliment instead, when he recognised the soldier whom his keen eyes had observed standing to his post ; the late comers were the ones he grew more gracious over, and quartered in the best places.

So this weary night passed away, and morning once again dawned with the iron-willed General Topí at his post, giving out fresh guns to those poor fellows who were doomed to die.

CHAPTER III.

TWO MARRIAGES AT ALLAHABAD.

CAPTAIN GEORGE JACKSON—for this plucky and remarkably lucky young man had obtained his captaincy under Sir Colin Campbell through some daring feats which he had performed, and who would not be daring when his life has been so well insured, as his had been?—came down to Allahabad, the city of God, with the column, to prepare for future enterprises, and secure his sweetheart before she sailed to Calcutta.

Barney McKay and Jackson, with Green and Sammy Tompkins, who attached himself to them, had been deputed to carry despatches to Sir Hugh Rose from the Commander-in-Chief, but before doing so, they were having a few days' well-merited rest at this sacred city.

And as "off duty" with soldiers either means a heavy spree, or else a respectable wedding, Green, now also Captain, and Jackson decided to postpone the spree until their spouses were safely off, and have as a preliminary step the wedding.

Mrs. Finch after a little demur had consented; Maggie Wilson without any hypocrisy about the matter had done likewise; as for Captain Wilson, he was delighted to see his girl mated to a rising young man, who was not a born swell, for the after

intercourse might have made him uncomfortable; so, all obstacles at last smoothed away, the two couples prepared for the grand sacrifice.

Sammy Tompkins had also met his sweet, Nelly King, but he had to be contented with a few surreptitious hugs and kisses; for although a dauntless boy, he could not yet afford to run the length of matrimony, so he contented himself with promising to be true till death, and played second fiddle at the festivities of the two captains.

Allahabad presented quite a festive appearance through the meeting of the long-parted friends and relatives at this river port, for although the insurrection was by no means crushed yet, still the backbone of the monster was severely injured; and at this city, which also, like other places throughout the province, had its black record of bloody massacres against it, order had once more been restored, and the Government now under Lord Canning, exercising clemency where it could with safety do so, permitted unarmed pilgrims to pass through and perform their hair-shedding ceremonies and ablutions at this junction of holy rivers.

Sir Colin Campbell was forced to wait here for reinforcements and supplies before he could take the field again, and as nothing could be done before these came, he rested on his laurels while his hard-worked men enjoyed themselves amongst their wives, children, and sweethearts, before they were all shipped to Calcutta, there to wait in terrible suspense until Peace once again spread her dove-like wings over the disturbed land.

Major Barney McKay was the great moving spirit

during this piping hour of peace, as he was equally *en evidence* in the moment of action; a good artist and scene painter, and a splendid stage manager and general master of ceremonies, he was about the only man there who really did not take an hour of rest, but then, like the sacred Ganges at this point, two great streams of vitalities joined in him, and rendered him impervious to fatigue; the Irish blood, clear and sparkling, like the blue Jumna, ever fresh and bright, and the Scotch blend, which, although turgid and muddy like the Ganges, gave him the sustaining quality which was required.

He acted as father to his little friend Mrs. Finch, on this second great occasion of her life, did most of the decorations of the church, and superintended the joint wedding breakfast of the two brides, as well decided upon quarters for them afterwards to spend their short honeymoon, so that they yielded themselves entirely up to his experienced and wise directions.

Between times, he got up a scratch company of performers, painted the scenery for the first dramatic piece, and planned out the costumes; all day long and most of the night this indefatigable man rushed about his various self-imposed duties, attending to each detail with a minuteness which did not escape the notice of that astute leader of men, Sir Colin, the result being as complete a success as that commander's calculations in the field usually were.

He selected his staff of assistants from the poor ladies, who, without this distraction of employment, would have drooped under the weight of their bereavements and sorrows, and kept them up with his

stern orders or jocular remarks, so that many who never thought to smile again, actually grew gay and laughing under his brightsome influence.

"A splendid fellow that McKay is," observed Sir Colin to Outram; "brave as a lion in action, prompt and quick to take advantage of emergencies, and the best man we have for an occasion like this."

So the brave major won favour on all sides as he dashed about in his pijamas, with the sweat rolling from him, and his size-colour brushes in his hands, with a considerable amount of the size-colour on his person, raging good-naturedly at the mistakes of some of the sad-spirited ones who were inclined to let their melancholy thoughts wander from their tasks, or drilling some duffer up to his part, who, for the life of him, could not remember his lines; and while he did so, his grateful commander wrote down his name in his despatches as one of the heroes worthy of that coveted decoration, the "Victoria Cross," for he had not only slain his hundreds in battle, but had been the direct means of saving the reason of so many of his own people.

At last the happy day for Jackson and Green arrived, and the camp gathered in force, and in full dress, to see them buckled for life.

The church was gaily hung with flags and evergreens, while native boys and girls had been employed to scatter lilies and roses before the advancing quartette and their supporters.

First came Captain Green and his best man in full regimentals, followed by the tiny but beautiful Mrs Finch, robed in a bewildering dress of white and gold, with the long train held up by her two

daughters, and led on by Major McKay, with his most upright, solemn and paternal air; he was the best actor in the army, and entered with soul into every part he took up, whether it was comic, graphic, or serious, and he was at his best on this occasion, therefore he impressed the congregation so much that no man amongst them smiled.

Then came Captain Jackson with his man, Sammy's father, also looking his handsomest; after which the once roguish, but now sedate, Maggie Wilson, came on with bashful air and downcast eyes, in white cashmere, led on by her father, who somehow failed to impress the audience (although it was his natural place) nearly so much as the assumed character of the major. Nature seldom impresses at first sight as art does.

Then the chaplain read over the service, which made two of what had been previously four, and the blushing brides came back, leaning, this time, upon the arms of their husbands, while the male portion of the audience cheered lustily, as was but natural to those careless and thoughtless creatures, as it was also only natural that many of the women who looked on should weep.

Sammy Tompkins found a place near the door of the church, where a few curious native pilgrims of both sexes had congregated to watch the ceremony. As the service went on, this obliging fellow generally explained to those nearest him, in Hindostanee, what the clergyman was saying.

One of the simplest dressed of the veiled women who stood near him paid great attention to his remarks, and at length pressed closer to him, and

began to ask him some questions. She was tall and slender in her build, but so closely muffled that Sammy couldn't form any idea of her probable age, only heard that she had a low, clear and penetrating voice, which trembled and grew husky at times.

"That is Captain Green who is getting spliced to the little beauty, and the other beside the tall one is my friend, Captain George Jackson."

"But tell, my Bachna Behadúr, does your religion permit men to marry their sisters?" asked this muffled one softly.

"Of course it don't, but there are no sisters here that I know about."

"Surely, your Captain Jackson is now marrying his sister, is he not?"

"Certainly not; he's splicing the late Miss Maggie Wilson, Captain Wilson's daughter, who has been his sweetheart for ages; he hasn't got a sister that I ever heard tell about."

"But some one told me she was his sister, Behadúr," faltered the voice.

"Then some one was miles from the truth."

"Yet they resemble each other as nearly as if one mother had suckled them both."

"Yes, at this distance they do look something like," replied Sammy carelessly, "but not when you're close up; you'll see them nearer presently, and then you'll notice the difference."

"And you say he was betrothed to her long ago?"

"For the past three years, at least, they have been looked on in the regiment as sweethearts."

"Ah!"

A sigh deep and heavy shook that veil, while the questioner leaned against one of her friends.

"Now the parson is asking if any one knows of a just and lawful impediment why them two should not be joined?" translated Sammy. "That's what the pause is for, so that the congregation may have time to answer if there is any objection, for in another minute it will be too late."

"Too late!" echoed the veiled woman; starting suddenly from the arms of her friend, and making a step forward, she gasped in a hoarse whisper:

"Ruho! Ruho!!"

The whisper was too inarticulate for any one to make out, as the woman evidently was choking with suppressed emotion, for, even as the whisper broke from the folds of her bŏŏrcka she flung up her clenched hand, and swinging round, fell prone into the outstretched arms of three of the women beside her, in as complete a faint as ever English lady could give way to.

Fortunately they were close to the door, so that without attracting much attention she was carried outside and laid within the shadow part of the verandah, where some more of her friends gathered round her wringing their hands.

She was still lying motionless in that out-of-the-way corner, without any of the English party heeding her, when the wedding procession passed out, preceded by the pipers of father McKay's regiment, and followed by the brass and fife bands of the companies represented by Jackson and Green, so the merry party went loudly on their triumphant march to the lavish breakfast which their brother officers had contributed

to, leaving that woman on her back, with her own kind beside her.

By-and-by, when the church had become empty, and this part of the street was deserted, for the crowd had rushed after the bands for cherrimeri, she recovered from her prolonged swoon with a weary and heart-wrung moan :

"Humko ek birnee ne dunkmara hy: Ubhee ghurko jaoonga."

These words she moaned in a heart-broken wail, then, rousing herself, she leapt to her feet, and cried savagely :

"Palku Mungao, juldee kuro."

The other women shrunk back as if expecting to be struck, then one of them beckoned to the bearers of a palankeen, waiting at the opposite side of the street, while the woman stood with clenched hands, heaving breasts and panting breath, which inflated the muslin about her face in gusts, and sounded like the soughing of wind behind an arras.

At the signal the palki-wallahs crossed over with the conveyance, and waited submissively at the verandah steps, then, signing the women to stand back again when they proffered their assistance, the mistress drew her robe closer about her and walked hastily down the steps and into the palankeen alone, the door of which was shut upon her, after which the bearers took it up and bore it quickly away.

"Some heads will fall in Jhansi for this," observed one of the women, as they prepared to follow. "Pray Allah that it may not be ours, for the tigress robbed of her young will appear like a lamb to our queen when she gets home."

"If Allah sends her victims enough amongst the Faringhees, we may escape," answered the other. "Come, let us hasten in case she requires us."

Saying which, the women set off with rapid feet in the direction that the palankeen had taken.

* * * * * *

The performance given that evening before Sir Colin Campbell and his staff was a brilliant success, and "Barney," as his friends all affectionately termed him, was greatly complimented, and won much kudos, but he had won that already, for wherever he had been stationed he had become notorious for making people happy around him, or, as he humorously remarked, "kept himself healthy by making a liver pill of himself."

A quiet week of enjoyment followed after this in the bungalow which Barney had chosen for the newly-wedded couples, for, considering the matter over carefully he came to the wise conclusion that two fond couples were better than one in a nest; they would not get wearied and quarrelling as newly-married people so often do when they first come together, for they would be appreciative company with each other, so he fixed it so; wise old Barney.

Then came the order for the women, children and sick to clear out of Oudh, and the men to prepare once more for action, for, the carriages and reinforcements having arrived, the steamers had to return.

Partings are always painful, even when the friends have the reasonable expectation of meeting again soon, but in the present instance, with these husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, fathers and children, God only could decide when, if ever, they were fated

to meet again; as Childe Harold so perfectly expresses it:

> "And there were sudden partings, such as press
> The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
> That ne'er might be repeated; who would guess
> If ever more should meet those mutual eyes?"

Mrs. Major Mortimer clung convulsively to her husband's neck, and forgot to warn him to be careful about the cleaning of his pipes, since she could no longer take care of them for him. Poor lady, she had suffered from many ominous visions of late, in which he had figured with ghastly cheeks and hideous wounds and she would not be comforted, for she had a presentiment that she would never see him again; for of course, not being amongst the elect as she was, there was no prospect of them meeting in the other world if anything chanced to him in this.

Poor lady, she was very much in earnest, and adored this wicked husband of hers as much in this fortieth year of her earthly pilgrimage as she had done when he had a waist like a wasp, and being a seer and prophetess, as so many of her divine sex become, for a few years in their meridian, she was terrified at the gruesome sights which she was compelled to witness all unseen to grosser senses.

It was a scene of universal tears and sobbings from the women, and husky muttered oaths from the men, who did their utmost to behave bravely, and who with one accord felt the strict necessity of invading the canteen the instant those steamers had disappeared from their brimming eyes.

Ah, many have said their last farewell on this day of December, 1857, and some may yet live to wish

that it had been their last adieu, while others again, and amongst these lucky ones must be counted those friends we have travelled with so far, will return to find their wives and sweethearts fond and faithful, waiting, as Penelope did, for their heroes, and rewarding them when they come back, they will go down to Calcutta when the fierce fray is over, laden with rich spoils and covered with glory, to pass the easy after-years telling the lurid story over, within their clubs and favourite village pubs, to admiring circles, which is the honest soldier's best reward over and above his medals and decorations.

"Death-and-Glory boys, every man-jack of them," as Barney McKay remarks, while he mounts his good old horse as leader of the despatch party to General Rose, now quartered in rebellious Rájputána.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RANEE'S FATE.

SIX long months of arduous marching, counter-marching, and hard fighting had dragged away since the women and children had parted with their husbands and fathers at Allahabad, and still the rebels have not been overcome.

They are everywhere beaten and driven from stronghold to stronghold, but, like the mythical Hydra, no sooner is one head cut off than another seems to take its place.

Barney McKay, Captains Green and Jackson, with Sammy Tompkins and his hound, Hector, have been retained by General Sir Hugh Rose, while Drill-Instructor Tompkins, with his friends King and

Wilson, are with Sir Colin Campbell in Oudh, as is also Major Mortimer.

The natives are disputing every foot of the way, for they have no hope of pardon ; when caught they are at once examined and if found guilty, hung or blown in indiscriminate batches from the cannon's mouths; doubtless many innocent ones and friends of the Government share in the fate of the guilty, but these are the chances and horrors of war ; the court-martials have no time for legal quirks. In many cases it is Jeddart justice, "hang first and try afterwards."

The English are victorious everywhere, but their labour is intense and unrelaxing, and now that summer is once more upon them with its awful heat and worse rains, even the man fondest of a brush with the enemy, and that is Barney McKay, wishes it was over so that he might have time to finish a decent cigar.

"Boys, I don't mind marching, and sweating, and fighting straight on from sunrise to sunset, year in, year out, if you like, so that I have time to get a wash and a smoke afterwards, but to be at it day and night like this—well, there, I don't mind confessing just this once that it's becoming monotonous, besides being mighty wearing on the swords, to say nothing about the wrists."

Major Barney McKay didn't really mind the hardships and constant work, although to please his companions he pretended to be so sick and tired of it, as he saw they were, for he was the most accommodating of chums so long as no one attempted to impose on his good nature ; but in reality if he had not had the

distraction of battle and fatigue-tramps, he would have worried out his life arranging the rooms, pictures, and hangings of his friends, for idleness and Major McKay were sworn foes.

There had been a vast amount of slaughter during these past six months, days and nights of battle and pursuit, when the swords of the officers and the bayonets of the rank and file grew blunt and twisted with the cutting and prodding at humanity, when they rode over men's bodies by hundreds, and made the land reek so much with blood that the eagles, vultures and kites grew as bloated and lazy as old maids' cockatoos. The eagles and vultures of Upper India during the past twelve months had become sad epicures, while the jackals went about as sleek and rounded in the paunches as pet poodles.

The Maulavi of Fyzabad, that impetuous and bloody-handed fanatic, was at rest with so many of his countrymen. He had made much trouble, and kept the pot of rebellion boiling for a long time, but at last he had met his doom by the pistol at the hand of his own countryman; but Nana Sahib, with his brother and nephew, were still at large. Tantia Topí, with the Begum of Oudh and the Ranee of Jhansi, defied them still, although most of the other leaders had paid the penalty of their rash folly and cruelty.

To-night, the 17th of June, 1858, they are besieging the rock-built citadel of Gwalior, where Tantia Topí and the Ranee of Jhansi have taken shelter, after the downfall of Jhansi and Morar, within these walls, with the remnant of their former large following, and are in a desperate position.

All day long the British have been battering at this

massive fortress, and to-night, with the full moon lighting up their operations, they are at it still. It is at this point of the siege that Major McKay, pausing to light a cheroot, had just taken his first puff, when a bullet from the walls dashed it from his lips; hence the plaintive grumble which he indulged in to his companions, Captains Green and Jackson, who were on the General's staff like himself; Sammy Tompkins, now a full-blown bugler, being, with his dog, beside the chief some few yards away.

Above them swung that great eastern moon in its full lustre, making the landscape almost as distinct as an English daylight scene, only more weird and thrilling in its silver and warm intensity.

The June heat, which had been terrific all day, had toned down somewhat, yet not much, for the earth felt like a baker's oven after the fire has just been taken out, or the floor of the hot room of a Turkish bath, so that even at this hour of midnight to think about sleep was an impossibility, and even to walk barefoot uncomfortable.

A cloudless ocean of sea-green atmosphere spread around that silver circle, that seemed in its dazzling whiteness to float very close to the world; while the planets and stars gathered in brightness as they receded from that greater light, until they flamed out like beacons studding a measureless plain.

It was the sort of night to make young men melancholy; the sort of night to lie rocking within a hammock under the shady branches of a tamarind tree, and think upon far-off England and those who were waiting to welcome them back, and while dreaming of these pleasures enjoy the fragrant and soothing cigar;

the sort of night when poetic minds would expect to see the whole court of the elf-king shaking the heavy dew-drops from their gossamer wings, as they flirted, and enjoyed their merry and soulless dancing.

In fact, it was the sort of night suitable to any other sort of game instead of the grim one to which it was at present devoted by those wearied men who had marched over a thousand miles, captured more than a hundred guns, forced their way through artfully-defended mountain passes and intricate jungles, waded and swam over rivers swarming with alligators, and dangerous quicksands, taken strongly-fortified forts, and conquered the enemy wherever they met him, no matter the odds, during the past six months.

As their gallant and wonderfully patient, but now almost broken-down, old general told them, when he thought he was at liberty to disband them, a fortnight before this night:

"Soldiers! I thank you with all my sincerity for your bravery, your devotion, and your discipline. When you first marched I told you that you, as British soldiers, had more than enough of courage for the work which was before you; but that courage without discipline was of no avail, and I exhorted you to let discipline be your watchword. You have attended to my orders. In hardships, in temptations, and in dangers, you have obeyed your general, and have never left the ranks. You have fought against the strong, and you have protected the rights of the weak and defenceless—of foes as well as friends. I have seen you in the ardour of the combat preserve and place children out of harm's way. This is the discipline of Christian soldiers, and this it is that

has brought you triumphant from the shores of Western India to the waters of the Jumna, and establishes without doubt that you will find no place to equal the glory of your arms."

This noble farewell address had been delivered a fortnight before, and still the wearied arms of the men had to ply their muskets and rammers, still were at the deadly, hard labour that knows no time for rest; while their leader, Sir Hugh Rose, stood at his post, although hardly able to hold the field-glass to his eyes, watching over them and directing them to further victories.

The great rock upon which the fortress was built rose up before them like the rock of Edinburgh Castle, solid, massive, and impregnable to cannon-balls or shell; each detail and cliff fissure showed out distinctly with the broad-staired pathway leading from the mighty gate, portcullis, and drawbridge, to the plain, dotted in parts with trees, buildings, and mosques. It seemed hopeless to bombard such a place, for the balls only flattened themselves against the granite without doing more damage than a few splinters of dust.

There were about six thousand fugitives inside this fortress, along with Tantia Topí and the Ranee of Jhansi, who had been driven from her own town with heavy losses to here, and as this was their last stand they were defending it desperately. From the walls the guns flamed down on the plain, as the batteries there were doing their utmost to reply; yet, so far the rebels had the advantage, for they were behind shelter, while the British force lay open at their feet.

Through that serene midnight sky the shells flew,

shrieking or exploding like fireworks on all sides, while the roar of cannon made the night, which might have been so romantic, hideous with the hellish din.

"Be Jabbers!" shouted Barney McKay, relapsing into his mother tongue in his excitement, "I have a plan to take that town, for the guns will never do it."

He rushed off red-hot with his scheme to the general, who, after listening patiently, at once gave his permission with the men required, remarking that the plan was extraordinary and daring enough to deserve success.

Sammy Tompkins went with the surprise party, as he could climb like a monkey, while Jackson and Green were deputed with their regiment to guard the main roadway, and while the guns continued to play on heavier than ever to cover McKay's approach, the army drew up in line and prepared for action.

Three hours passed away after this without any signs coming from the bold Barney, and already the grey dawn was beginning to creep along the eastern horizon, when suddenly the great gates were thrown open, the portcullis raised and the drawbridge lowered, and with a rush the besieged poured down the steep road, the cavalry first, and the infantry after them. Barney had succeeded in his plan of alarming the garrison and driving them out.

Then the fiercest battle they had yet experienced took place on that plain under this moonlit and greyling sky; those who still had hopes or meant to keep life as long as possible, such as Tantia Topí, rushed at the weakest portion of the environment, and breaking through it, fled as fast as their horses' legs

could carry them, with the troopers after them in hot haste. About five hundred escaped in this fashion, for Sir Hugh Rose had to recall the pursuers to help him with those who, tired of the struggle, were making a final bid for paradise by killing as many as they could before they died themselves.

Those natives who now occupied the field were fighting with a savage disregard for their own lives, fighting as long as they could stand, and even when cut down, in many cases they slashed at the horses' legs as they galloped over them, and managed to do much damage before they gave up the ghost—in fact, before many moments had gone by the field was covered with corpses, and only a remnant of about two hundred left out of the crowd which had fled from the castle.

It was what they hoped would be the final engagement of this campaign, and the British put all their force and energy to get it over quickly, as there could be no question of surrender. Up on that lofty rock, the houses which the McKay party had lit were blazing and spreading into a general conflagration, which soon, in its lurid vividness, blanked out the lustre of the moon, and while they fought, honouring the foes that so bravely fell, the daylight was creeping up every instant stronger and stronger.

Captain Jackson was in the thick of it as usual, distinguishing himself with his sword and agile strength of wrist as well as the managing of his horse. He was working his way through a body-guard of devoted warriors who had surrounded their chief on a small mound, and who was noticeable not only for his fierce activity, but for his splendidly caparisoned white horse.

As Jackson mowed his way towards this warrior, who was armed cap-à-pie with his chain visor over his face and a tiara of blazing jewels on his helmet, a rich prize thought this practical young man as, even in his heat, he took notice of the golden ornaments and gems, and resolved that they should become his property by right of conquest.

As Jackson drew near, the chief evidently divined his purpose, and, signalling with his tulwar for his adherents to stand aside and see to themselves, in another moment the white horse and the black horse which carried Jackson met, while sabre and tulwar joined with a clash.

Jackson was a splendid swordsman, yet for a few seconds he had all his work cut out for him guarding that fierce and scientific onslaught.

Like a lurid flame it played about him, now gleaming pale with the moon's reflection, now scarlet as it caught on its polished surface the firelight from the burning stronghold, while the horses bit savagely at each other, and tore at the dry ground with their iron-shod hoofs.

Then all at once that halo of fierce light was dimmed, for the English captain had seen his advantage, and passed the blade of his sword through chain armour and body, and the native antagonist dropped his sword-arm and head.

A wild shriek burst from the visor as Jackson withdrew his sword from the breast before him, a shrill shriek like a woman's, which made his blood run cold in his veins, as he hastily caught the falling figure and drew it to his own horse's neck, while the riderless white horse stood snorting and shivering for a

moment, and then galloped wildly across the bloody corpse-covered field; for while Jackson had been fighting this duel, his comrades had demolished the enemy, so that the night's work was over, and they were all resting now and wiping the stains from their blades.

"Agi Jau," panted that choking voice, so near to his own mouth, "you can uncover me now, for I have got all my desire. Your sword has tasted my heart."

A mighty trembling fell upon George Jackson as he slid from his saddle with his load, and, laying it gently on the ground, removed the helmet and visor, to see what he expected to see—his wife for a month; then, for the first time in all his many butcherings, he felt like a murderer, and grew weak with the horror of the situation.

The lovely dark eyes opened as he uncovered that beautiful face, and the lips that had once so passionately kissed him smiled again tenderly, as she said faintly:

"You are a sure messenger of King Death, Agi Jau, and I am happy, since what I have prayed for has come to pass—your hand the deliverer."

"Who are you? Ah, my poor lass!"

"Your wife, George—your first wife, my lord and master. She who was the Ranee of Jhansi, and gave you her heart to split."

"Oh, my God!"

"Never grieve about that matter, Agi Jau; all good husbands give this last favour to those they love best. And it is well that my heart's blood should flow over you at this time, for it was my best gift, although

I have another for you which may please you better. Hold me up, for this blood is choking me."

Without a word he drew up her dying face until it rested on his perjured breast, too much conscience-stricken to utter a word.

The sun was now rising, and the woman once more opened her languid eyes.

"That is better—that is where I want to stay until my soul can enter yours. You know the secret of the treasure-chamber of Jhansi, where I had you—for a time to myself. The vaults lie under the mosque, and Patla is there to show you how to reach them—they are yours as the last gift from—your—first—wife. Farewell, my love—my——"

That passionate, erring, but human heart had pumped out its last drop, and George Jackson, the heir to the Rajah's fortune, held in his arms the inanimate remains of what once had been a queen.

CHAPTER V.

THE END.

IN the heavy and shaded depths of the Himalayan Téraï, that deadly region of poisoned vapours, tepid swamps, and impenetrable forest, a man, a woman, and a child of about three or four years of age, are staggering along.

Their garments, formerly of richest texture, hang in scanty tatters about their fever-weakened limbs, so that it is as well the forest hides their nakedness and misery from eyes profane.

The woman and child have been beautiful once upon a time, before they passed into this domain of death ;

but their tresses hang uncared for about their wan and hollow cheeks, while their dark eyes burn brightly with fever.

The man has the aspect of a hunted beast, as he is, for it is the great Peshwa of the Marathas, with his favourite wife and daughter, who has entered upon the last stage of his journey.

All his friends and followers are dead except these nearest to him, Zulma and little Bheta, and they are also dying fast.

Tantia Topí, the daring and crafty fox, after many a turn and twist, had at last found the rope he had so long evaded.

The dauntless Begum of Oudh, with her paramour, had succumbed to the all-conquering, dominant power of the Faringhee.

Azim-Ullah, Rao, Bala, and the others had met their doom in various ways since they had plunged with their master into this shadow-land. The English could no longer follow them here, it is true, as they had done for months with their blood-hounds through the jungle; but the Angel of Death had stalked alongside of them, picking out one after the other as they went forward, until only these three remained.

The tigers settled Bala and Rao. Azim-Ullah, accustomed to fine living, fell first victim to the malaria; then the women of the royal zenana, no longer able to walk, were consigned to the flames, after promising to prepare the future household of their master against his coming.

Some of the slaves fled in horror from him at this final test of their fidelity, the others had to be dropped behind as they grew faint and useless, and the wild

denizens of this fertile realm found them and used them, when their master could no longer do so. So this royal father and husband, with his wife and child, had at last to shift for themselves like the ordinary aboriginals.

"My lord, I can go with you no farther," moaned Zulma, as she sank at the foot of an immense trunk. "If you have strength left, raise up my pyre for me, and let me die like a royal daughter of India."

The Brahmin husband kissed his dying wife gravely between the eyes, and then leaving Bheta beside her mother, he set about gathering the dryest branches he could find, and placing them carefully in the required position, built up the suttee, spreading over it the softest leaves.

It took a long time to do this, so that darkness was almost upon them before it was completed, for he was very languid and feeble; then he went over to his wife and found that her spirit had passed while he had been working; she was lying dead, with her arms around Bheta, who had fallen asleep on her mother's breast.

Nana made haste to bathe the body before darkness set in, for then the forest would be alive with ravenous beasts of prey, the tiger, the panther and leopard would scent that loved and sacred dead and defraud him of his labour; so taking the sleeping Bheta from her mother's arms, he carried the burden to a pool near at hand, and gave her the ablutions as well as he was able; then laying her on her leafy couch, he struck his flint and steel, and with the tinder he soon had the flames blazing round and purifying that dearly-loved clay.

Not a minute too soon was that pyre lit, for already the forest was filled with gliding shapes, whose awful shrieks and roarings banished the silence of day, and appalled the ears that heard them; still the wearied Bheta slumbered on, for she had become used to these nightly outcries.

All through the hours of darkness the priestly husband fed that devouring fire, and repeated his prayers and litany for the dead, who was now being carried to heaven on those lurid eddies, while round him and his sleeping child prowled those shadowy forms with their phosphorescent eyes and horrid roars of disappointment.

Daylight, or rather the dim and only light which ever illumined that closed-in world, came upon him, and the pyre was reduced to ashes; then when he tried to wake his daughter he discovered that she did not know him, nor could she walk, for the fever was heavy upon her, therefore he took her up upon his shoulders and staggered wearily off towards the north, where, if he could but get amongst the snows of the Himalayas, they might find life.

Another night and another fire, this time for little Bheta, who had died fancying that it was her mother who held her. Perhaps it was, Nana thought, as he watched the little body consume, for he also was half wandering in his mind, and talked away aloud as if he was surrounded by his friends, but no victims came to disturb him, only the wild beasts looked with their glaring eyes through the tangle, and darted back with shrieks of affright as the fiery sparks blew towards and fell amongst them.

Another day he rose and staggered blindly onward,

alone, but muttering to himself his orders to the dead slaves who had so faithfully obeyed him in life, and perhaps still followed his uncertain steps through this awful region, of heat, moisture and life in death.

Gigantic trees towered above his head with their vast boles embraced with creepers, and line upon line of filaments and roots dropping from the interlacing branches, amongst which chattered myriads of monkeys, baboons, and birds of glorious plumage, where also the enormous pythons and boas wound themselves around the orchids and radiant flowers, while amongst the warm slime in which his naked feet so constantly slipped, swarmed scorpions, centipedes, and other venomous insects.

On, under those interlacing boughs and lofty green roof he passed, between those thousand pillars of different dimensions, and those arches of clustering vines, each green object trying to reach up to the shaded sun-light and leaving their shapeless stems in the shadow; he was unconscious of being in this grand hall of nature, he thought himself back to the miniature one of Bithúr.

At last he stumbled over a spreading root which grew by the side of a sluggish stream, and could no longer rise; his hour had come.

Then, as he lay resting on his elbow, with his matted head reaching over that inky pool, which reflected that haggard face and those burning but mindless eyes, a figure *grew* beside him, the form of Jasim, the Buddhist, and as he became definite, the timid crocodile which had been watching the fallen man from the other side of the stream, plunged into its sullen depths and disappeared.

Slowly the old man went about his promised duty, until the pyre was raised up to a royal height, and then he sat down to wait for the end.

"I am the priest of Vishnu and must not touch blood," muttered the dying man slowly. "Bring me water from the Ganges so that I may wash myself clean."

"It is here, my son," murmured the old man, as he took a vessel from his waist-band and poured it slowly over the face and head which now lay turned upwards, for Nana had rolled on to his back.

"So thy sins be washed away, and thy intentions only judged."

The jaw had fallen at the touch of that sacred fluid, and the eyes were staring dimly at the green leaves above, staring perhaps after the spirit which was still lingering there, and which only the fire could set at liberty.

Then the old man lifted up the wasted form of the young man, and placed it easily upon the pyre, which he proceeded to light.

A crackle of dry twigs took place, then the volumes of smoke hid the body of that terror of India, as the flames burst fiercely from all sides, and made the forest ruddy as if it had been sunset.

So it was, the sunset of rebellion in India, or patriotism, or what you like to term this uprising. The great Indian Mutiny was at an end.

THE END.

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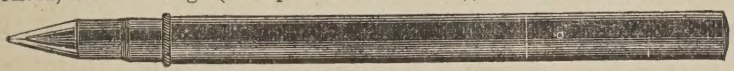

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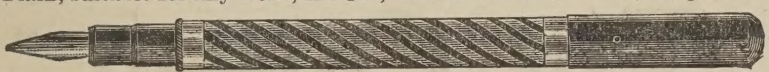

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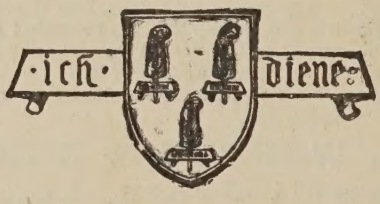

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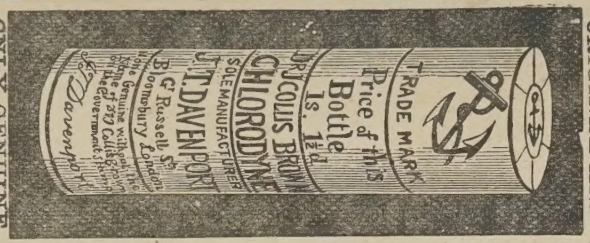

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